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PRACTICAL ETHICS

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# PRACTICAL ETHICS

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The master said: "If the things be kept simple,  
we shall seldom lose our way."

*The Sayings of Confucius*

# CHAPTER I

## PRELIMINARY

ETHICS seeks to answer two questions—What is to be regarded as right and as wrong? and Why should people do what is right and not do what is wrong? In other words, the questions are—What is the content of morality? and What is the sanction for morality?

It may be said that both these questions are within the province of Religion and that Philosophy need not concern herself with them. But mankind is divided among the adherents of many religions; while their teachings often coincide, often also they diverge. If Moslems and Hindus, Christians and Jews, Protestants and Catholics, have different ideas of the right and the wrong of a given case, what is to be the outcome? Are opposite lines

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of conduct to be held to be right in the same circumstances for different people? Or is there need of some further test, of some other authority to give judgement?

Even among adherents of the same creed, when a conflict arises in some matter of moment, each side will claim a religious sanction for its view.

“The will of God prevails. No doubt, no doubt—  
Yet, in great contests, each side claims to act  
In strict accordance with the will of God.  
Both may, one must be wrong.”<sup>1</sup>

Further, as civilization develops, many of the rules of conduct in a country will gradually change, although the same religion may be professed throughout. New discoveries set new problems, and new ideas bring about new customs. One age will approve, and its religion will not condemn, slavery, or duelling, or war, while a later age may abhor them. Morality evolves. There can be no absolute standard, ordained, unchanging.

<sup>1</sup> For the sources of quotations see list of references, p. 241.



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Again, there are some people almost everywhere who do not accept the current theological beliefs, or who, accepting them formally, are not effectively influenced by them in their daily lives. If morality rested upon those beliefs alone, these people would have no basis for a moral code or reason for moral conduct.

The religions clearly have a great part to play in the realm of ethics. But, for the reasons that have been given, Philosophy cannot withdraw from that field, in the conviction that it is fully covered, and to the satisfaction of all mankind, by her sister Religion.

Nor can Reason surrender the field in favour of Intuition. There are some who hold that there is a natural instinct implanted in human beings, of which conscience is the spokesman, and which is an infallible guide to right and wrong. They say of morality, as St. Augustine said of Time, "I know what it is when you do not ask me." If this theory were true,

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mankind would be unanimous as to what constitutes right conduct ; but experience shows that this is very far from the case. For one man's "intuition " contradicts another man's "intuition." One person will be a "conscientious objector " to some law which his neighbour accepts as obviously right. When this happens, what guidance can we get from this principle ? "When private emotion is regarded as the test of truth," controversies arise which are intractable.

Besides, since one age will unanimously condemn actions which, in another age, had been approved by most people's consciences almost without question, how can individual conscience be accepted as an absolute standard, not open to challenge ? History may turn her pages almost haphazard and will show a hundred instances of deeds done by excellent men from the most conscientious motives which later times have stigmatized as acts of cruel persecution or ruthless barbarism. It is recognized that conscience may err. But

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if conscience is itself the final authority, who is to detect the error, and remedy it?

Some of our primeval instincts may be rather the survivals of animal impulses which were better eradicated than authoritative guides to a true morality. Evolution shows us how tendencies that have been inherited from millions of years of animal and primitive human ancestry have been carried forward into present society. "Mankind is the animal at the head of the Primates, and cannot escape habits of mind which cling closely to habits of body." "Man's habits change more rapidly than his instincts. To-day we are born with instincts appropriate to our palæolithic ancestors, and when we follow our instincts alone we behave in a palæolithic manner."

We cannot find in intuition, conscience, instinct, a reliable and universally acceptable criterion of right and wrong.

In the eighteenth century the somewhat similar doctrine of "Natural Rights" played a considerable part, particularly in

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the sphere of politics. It was asserted that each man came into the world endowed, not only with certain physical qualities, but also with certain social rights. Laws and customs must conform to those rights, for they took priority. They set the standards of right and wrong. In the preamble to the American Declaration of Independence of 1776 stood the famous words, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Thirteen years later the French National Assembly declared, "The end of all political associations is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man ; and these rights are liberty, property, security, and resistance of oppression." A truth, however, is not "self-evident" unless it is such that no sane man at any time will deny it. But these principles have constantly been denied. Indeed at the time that the Declaration

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of Independence was promulgated, negro slavery—an obvious contradiction to its terms—was an established institution in America, and it remained so for nearly a century. In many parts of Europe in our own day the claim to liberty has been challenged by philosophers and rejected by dictators. The “natural and imprescriptible right of property” is repudiated by a hundred and twenty millions of people in Russia. Assertion is not enough. It is not enough to proclaim that this or that is “self-evident.” If someone says that, for him, it is not self-evident, what then?

In the nineteenth century many thought that a firm basis for ethics had at last been furnished by the newly discovered principle of evolution. Again it was “Nature” that was invoked. It had been found to be her law that through ceaseless competition, through a constant struggle for existence, the fittest should survive and become predominant. Harsh in its immediate results, the process, it was said, was

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ultimately beneficent. In the long run everywhere and automatically it brought progress—in the vegetable world, among animal species, among the races and communities of men. A true morality must consist, therefore, in non-interference with a fundamental and useful natural process. Attempted interference must in any event be futile. The doctrine was held to justify in the social sphere an unlimited competition between individuals, and in the international sphere a ruthless competition between states. It turned industrial oppression into a virtue and war into an ordained instrument of human progress.

Closer thinking, however, soon showed that all this was fallacious. In the first place, as Huxley pointed out, “survival of the fittest” does not mean survival of the best; it means no more than “the survival of those best fitted to cope with their circumstances.” It has therefore no connection with the moral problem at all. Nor does the competition which exists under natural conditions bear any resem-

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blance, either in methods or in results, to the practice of organized war between human communities.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, biology did not endorse the claim that evolution guaranteed progress. True that there is evident through the ages a general upward trend ; but in particular cases survival may be achieved through degeneration ; some types even survive only through becoming parasitical on others ; while vast numbers, of course, fail to survive and become extinct. Among human societies history gives no warrant for any faith that progress is certain and automatic. Periods of greatness in nations are not regularly followed by periods of enhanced greatness, but often by decadence. There is no straight line of excellence running parallel with the forward and upward line of Time.

Thirdly, the evolutionary process does not work only through competition and strife, destruction and elimination. Co-operation is equally an element. As Dar-

<sup>1</sup> This point is further discussed in Chapter XI.

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win said, "the soft lining of the nest is its instrument as well as the sharpening of teeth and claws." At the dim beginning of organic life stands the impulse of single cells to combine in forming higher units. Among its latest manifestations there is conspicuous the habit of co-operation in many species of insects, of birds, and of mammals. The ants, bees, and wasps are the best-known examples. Many animals hunt together in packs, or form groups for mutual defence. The bee that stands at the entrance of the hive and whirrs its wings to ventilate the passages ; the starling that combines with others to drive off a hawk ; the deer that takes position as sentinel for the herd—each of these is moved by a primary impulse. It is an impulse not less powerful, not less a part of the evolutionary process, than that which creates conflict, impelling colonies of ants to attack one another, or birds to quarrel, or stags to fight to the death. The impulse of co-operation is implanted deep in nature ; and in human nature with the



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rest. The family, the tribe, spring from a tendency which is innate. "Men," said Emerson, "as naturally make a state, or a church, as caterpillars a web."

But if evolution gives no guarantee for the production of the best ; if it gives no assurance of continuous progress ; and if it works not through one principle, competition, but through co-operation as well, balancing one against the other—then clearly it is useless to hope that we can find there any guidance in our search for standards of right and wrong.

There is yet another possible basis for an ethical code, seldom advocated nowadays, but accepted in earlier times almost universally—the custom of the community. "Originally," said Bergson, "custom is the whole of morality, and as religion forbids departure from custom, morality is co-extensive with religion." The idea is enshrined, for example, in the ancient Hindu laws of Manu : "the custom handed down in regular succession since time im-

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memorial is called the conduct of virtuous men." But this involves the conclusion that whatever are the laws and customs of a particular society at a particular time must be accepted in perpetuity. It would compel us to believe that "cannibalism is moral in a cannibal country." Ethics becomes a stereotyped code, and no generation may ever seek a higher standard of conduct than its predecessor. We need hardly stay to examine more closely that creed.

After so many negatives where shall we find our positive ? If neither theology, nor intuition, nor natural rights, nor the principle of evolution, nor established custom, can give full and satisfactory answers to our questions, where shall we find the answers ?

## CHAPTER II

### THE TEST OF RIGHT AND WRONG

It will be convenient now to separate our two problems, postponing till later the question Why people should act rightly, and considering first the question What right action is.

Different schools of philosophy will give different answers. I do not propose to discuss here the various views, but would offer for consideration a statement of the one which I suggest is acceptable. It is the doctrine that is founded upon the broad principle that actions must be judged by their consequences.

All attempts to find any *a priori* test have, I believe, failed ; to continue them would be unlikely to lead to any better outcome. We must therefore proceed *a posteriori*. Ideas, principles, laws, customs,

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deeds, are to be weighed by their results. They are to be accounted right if they will conduce to human welfare, and wrong if they will not.

At once the question arises—What is meant by “welfare”? And to this no simple reply can be given; for it is plain, on looking around us, that welfare is not a single thing, but consists in a combination of many.

Moral philosophers have spent much labour in attempting to define “The Good”; but no definition has yet been proposed which commands general agreement. May not the reason be that “the Good” is merely “a fictional abstraction,” that it corresponds to nothing actual in the universe or in human society?

So, also, theologians and philosophers have discussed through the centuries what is termed “the problem of Evil,” and have found it insoluble. It may be suggested that it is insoluble for the simple reason that it does not exist. There is no such thing as “a problem of Evil.”

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*Evils* there are in the world, obvious and numerous enough—evils of disease, accident, crime, vice ; evils springing from wrong social systems or war, from fire or storm, drought or flood. Each one has to be confronted by such means as man can command, and experience shows that they may often be confronted with success. The particular evils present their particular problems ; but there is no one Problem of Evil. That is merely an invention of the sophisticated human intellect. It is the same with “ The Good.” The question in what it consists cannot be answered, if there is no such thing. You cannot give a right answer to a wrong question.

Philosophy will stand on a firm foundation only if it is built, not on reasoning based on reasoning, but on the facts of the universe, of nature and of human life. We see plainly enough in the world around us that there are a number of different things generally agreed to be good. Some

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arise out of our physical characters. Health rather than sickness, a meal when one is hungry, a rest when one is tired, a shelter from inclement weather—that these are “goods” is indeed self-evident, because this at least no sane man would deny. There are other satisfactions that are almost universally felt, satisfactions derived from sympathy and love and sense of duty. There are pleasures, such as viewing splendid scenery or beautiful sunsets. There are the many gifts of art and of science, the many achievements of a high civilization. It is not possible to bring all these into a single definition of “the Good.” Any definition wide enough to be complete would be so vague as to be useless. “Human welfare” can only be defined, then, as the collective name for a vast number of things, each one of which in its turn is beneficial.

Other questions arise as soon as we examine this doctrine of consequences. Consequences of what kind and to whom?

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Are we to take account only of immediate results, or should we include also indirect effects upon habits, customs, laws ? Does "human welfare" mean the welfare of the whole race, regardless of the interest of the individual ? The answer to these questions must clearly be that the consequences are the total consequences of the act—direct and indirect, immediate and remote, to the agent and to others.

On this the objection will spring to mind that, if each person on every occasion has to consider afresh the ultimate and universal consequences of any particular action that he may be contemplating, the result would be moral chaos. The task would be far beyond the powers of the deepest and quickest thinker, much more of ordinary men and women. But that, of course, is not the position. Happily we do not "start from scratch." In the progress of the centuries particular "goods" come to be grouped together ; general rules of conduct are deduced ; creeds, codes, customs develop. The lesson of ages of experience

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in countless households may be formulated in a proverb ; the wisdom crystallized in it is the popular guide in similar cases. A great religious teacher or a great poet may in a flash sum up the diffused, and perhaps, unrealized, experience of generations. His insight is recognized ; his teaching is accepted ; his authority afterwards points the way. Truthfulness, honesty, courage, chastity, are ranked among the things that are good and are counted as virtues ; their opposites are bad and are vices. Habits are formed in individuals by inherited qualities, by training in childhood, by the influence of the community. The normal person in the ordinary circumstances of daily life does not ponder and balance at every moment what is right and what is wrong, he acts by habit and as a matter of course. But when the individual is not normal, or has not been subjected to the usual influences, or when marginal questions arise, or when there is reason to think that the customary code is in error and should be revised—then there has to



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be a valuation of “consequences” ; then we must go back to more fundamental principles ; then we must try to gauge what will best promote the welfare, now and in the long run, of the individuals directly concerned and of the community.

Experience is the guide ; the test of trial and error, discussion, example, are the means. Ancestral experience, its lessons transmitted as tendencies innate in later generations ; experience of individuals, remembered by themselves, their families, their neighbours ; the experience of nations, recorded in history—all come into the process. The deliberate judgements of individuals and the diffused common sense of the society make the decision.

Let me give one or two examples of this process as it has operated in practice.

If a man is insulted or injured, is it right or is it wrong for him to challenge his opponent to fight ? In earlier centuries the answer would unhesitatingly be given that it is right. It would have been regarded as fundamental to human nature that a

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man who was wronged should vindicate his honour or his interest by fighting. To do otherwise would be condemned as cowardice. An elaborate code of duelling was developed in Europe, and, among large classes of society, became as binding as a law, or more binding. Then doubts began to arise. As the result, perhaps, of religious influences, or the spread of rationalism, or the establishment of impartial law-courts to which resort was more easy ; through the realization that the more skilful duellist usually won even though he was in the wrong ;—whatever the causes may have been, thoughtful men here and there began to condemn the duel as an institution. It came to be a matter for discussion whether it was right or was wrong. In course of time more and more people formed the opinion that, whatever might be the benefits that might attach to duelling, the loss of valuable lives, often on account of trifles, far outweighed them. Duelling gradually fell into disfavour ; at last public opinion turned definitely against it ; as the best

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means to break the custom, laws were passed for its suppression. Then experience, in the countries where such laws had been enacted, showed that the direct consequences were good and that indirect consequences for harm had not followed ; the standard of courage and honour was not found to have been lowered. The example was followed elsewhere, and where it was not, the countries concerned were regarded by the rest of mankind as having fallen behind, in that particular, in the forward march of civilization. Over the greater part of the world the rightness or wrongness of duelling ceased to be a question for discussion. The argument that it sprang from an ineradicable impulse in human nature was quietly dropped when the practice itself disappeared. Through experience, discussion and the influence of common sense, followed by changes in law and in custom, the action of offering and accepting challenges to duels has, almost everywhere, been taken out of the category of right and put into the category of wrong.

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Sometimes a general change of standpoint, sometimes a new discovery of science, will alter the judgement of right and wrong in a particular case. For instance, in primitive times the killing of insects wantonly would not have aroused comment or question. In a humanitarian age a different feeling prevails ; children are taught not to do it ; “ he would not hurt a fly ” becomes a form of praise for a kindly disposition. But later still, science having discovered that house-flies carry disease, to destroy them becomes a moral act. Sterne described Uncle Toby, when he released out of the window the fly which had buzzed about his nose all dinner-time and which he had at last caught, saying, with an amiable sentimentality that has been quoted for nearly two hundred years, “ Go, poor devil, get thee gone, why should I hurt thee ? This world surely is wide enough to hold both thee and me.” But he did not know that if that fly had happened to be a carrier of the germs of typhoid fever, the action

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would have been as wrong morally as opening a tiger's cage in a crowded Zoological Garden. In progressive countries the Public Health Authorities, the schools, private associations, make known the importance of destroying the flies where they exist and of getting rid of their breeding-places. The results are found to be beneficial, in that the prevalence of certain diseases is lessened ; children and adults who would have sickened, and perhaps died, remain in health. A new item has been added to the code of right conduct.

Numberless examples might be given. By such processes as these, working through long periods of time, the ways of life of men living in communities have been evolved.

The consequences to be taken into account are the total consequences of an act, including the results to the agent himself. There is no reason to omit any particular group of consequences. This is an essential point, especially when the effects of the act influence character.

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Experience shows that nothing conduces more to welfare than that combination of qualities which is called good character. A "man of character" is one who has adopted for himself certain rules of life, which he may be relied upon to follow on any occasion that may arise.

A man's character, such as it is at any moment, is largely the outcome of his own deeds in the past. Every act has its recoil upon the agent. "It is right to say," as Professor Bergson put it, "that what we do depends on what we are ; but it is necessary to add that we are, in some measure, what we do, and that we are creating ourselves continually." And a man's deeds are the direct outcome of his thoughts. A thought also is an event ; it is, in a sense, an act. There is truth in the saying, "Your thoughts are making you."

In this connection the question of Motives has to be considered. It is universally agreed that good motive is an essential part of morality. There are some who say that this rules out the principle of

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consequences as the ultimate test in ethics, since motive is one thing and results are another. Let us examine this contention.

It is no doubt true that if an act, together with the motive that inspires it, is taken in isolation, the motive would be the starting-point. If the motive is bad the man is acting, in that respect, immorally. The consequences of the act may be good, but nevertheless the motive is bad, and the good consequences do not alter that fact. Therefore, it may be said, the doctrine of consequences as the test of rightness does not apply in such cases, and for that reason it must be rejected as unsatisfactory.

That conclusion would certainly follow—in the conditions given ; it being assumed that the act and its motive are to be considered in isolation. But those are not the conditions of actual life. Those are only the conditions of the philosopher's laboratory, so to speak. In actual life the motive of any particular act is part of the agent's character, and his character is the

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result of prior influences, which include his own previous acts. The motive is no doubt a starting-point in respect of the act in question, but it is a culminating-point when seen from the standpoint of the man's ancestry, his environment and his previous actions. So viewed—and this is the only view which corresponds with the real situation—it becomes plain that motives also come within the realm of consequences.

Moral philosophy has been much concerned with this particular issue—how far an action is to be considered right if the direct results are good but if the motive for doing it is corrupt and dishonourable ; or, conversely, if the results turn out to be harmful although the act itself was well-meant. Is the test of rightness to be objective, in relation to the visible results, or subjective, in relation to the motives of the doer ? There is no agreement among philosophers on this point. Here again may not the disagreement be due to the fact that the issue is not being fairly put ?

Suppose the case of a man who learns



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that a murder is being planned ; he gives the information to the person threatened, but only after he has successfully imposed a condition that a substantial sum of money shall be paid him as a reward. The action in itself is clearly good, for unless murders are prevented welfare will not be served ; but the motive is bad, for it is the duty of good citizens to join in preventing crime independently of the prospect of personal advantage. The philosopher in such a case finds difficulty in answering the question whether the act is right or wrong. But the issue is not fairly stated in those terms. There is not one question here but two—first, is it right to give information that will prevent crime ? And, second, is it right to insist upon a reward for so doing ? The answer to the first is in the affirmative, and to the second in the negative. If, in all such cases, two separate issues are confused together no sound answer is possible.

Another aspect of the problem, often considered by writers on ethics, is pre-

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sented by the case of a man who takes all possible pains to ensure that his action in given circumstances is right ; through no fault of his, the results turn out to be definitely harmful ; was his conduct, in doing what he did, right or wrong ? The actual consequences did not “ conduce to welfare,” yet no one would say that the man was blameworthy. I think that the true answer is that given by Professor Moore in his book on Ethics in this Series—that the action was wrong. It seemed at the time that it was right, but the results showed that in fact it was wrong. Yet the man would not be censured for what he did if he had in fact taken all possible precautions.

In practical conditions, however, that is seldom the case. When something goes amiss the person at fault will often say, “ I did my best, and one cannot do more.” And that no doubt is true if, here again, the event is considered in isolation. But earlier factors cannot be excluded. It is not enough for a man to do his best ; it

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is also necessary that he should have previously made every effort to ensure that his best shall in fact be good. A general makes certain dispositions of his troops, based on the information at his command and determined by his own experience and training. If he is defeated in the battle, he will claim that he has "done his best," and that he acted rightly in the circumstances as known to him. Yet a better general, who had taken pains to secure more reliable information and who had made a more correct survey of the position, might have won a victory.

It is hardly necessary to point out that "consequences," in this connection, must be events integrally related to the act itself. Something which may chance to happen after the act has been done, affecting in some manner the persons concerned in it, does not enter into the question of the rightness or wrongness of the act itself. A station-master dispatches a train at the usual time in the usual way ; on its journey it meets with an accident, which the station-

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master could not possibly have foreseen. It is true that, if for some reason he had not sent off the train, the accident would not have happened ; and it might be suggested that the principle that actions must be judged right or wrong according to their results is thereby proved unsound. But it cannot be seriously contended that the accident was "the consequence of" the station-master dispatching the train on that day, just as he had dispatched it on every other day. The accident was the consequence of quite other events, and the case put is not relevant to the issue.

Before we pass on, there is another criticism still to be considered. It is sometimes said that, if we confess ourselves unable to find any single criterion by which "goods" can be valued in comparison with one another, we shall be putting them all on the same level. What is noble or holy or inspiring would be ranked with what is physically satisfying ; they all con-

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duce to welfare in some fashion ; the principle that things are good or bad according to their consequences gives no reason for preferring the higher goods to the lower.

It is difficult to see the ground for this objection. There may be a scale of " goods," and some may be recognized as in a higher category than others. Precisely the same process as enables us to say that this is good and that is bad, enables us also to say that this other is better and that one is best of all.

There are indeed many cases in which it makes no difference what the choice is ; for example, a preference for one flavour or one odour, for one kind of music or one kind of scenery. Individual taste is then the final arbiter and no question of ethics arises. But where different results do follow from the nature of the choice, ethics cannot allow the subjective element to be conclusive. It must find a test which will decide, not only what is good or bad, but also what is better and best. The

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results to be expected must be weighed. Ethics cannot go beyond that general principle. It would be putting forward pretensions that would not stand the test of practical application if it claimed that it could ever provide a scale-balance which would automatically decide in any given case what is good or bad, or which is the greater good or the lesser.

The Utilitarian School endeavoured to provide such a balance. They accepted the primary principle that "ethical precepts must be judged in the light of the consequences which result from the practice of them." But in the endeavour to obtain precision, Bentham and the thinkers who followed him adopted also two secondary principles : first, that the consequences to be taken into account had relation only to "happiness" ; second, that happiness was to be measured by the attainment of "pleasure" and the avoidance of "pain." Bentham himself held, further, that there could be drawn up a sort of calculus of pleasures and pains ; that these could be

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divided, so to speak, into lots, be multiplied by the number of people affected, and the totals balanced against one another ; the result would show, almost mathematically, which of two courses would produce the greatest happiness of the greatest number and ought therefore to be preferred.

In spite of the brilliant qualities of the Utilitarian group their teaching has not survived. It was seen that the words " utility," " happiness," " pleasure," " pain," could only be accepted as the basis for a moral code if they included very many things which the words did not usually imply. The martyr who rightly went to the stake rather than deny his faith might be said, in a sense, to do so for a useful purpose, to be promoting his own happiness, and to find in his act pleasure rather than pain ; but the meaning of the words is being stretched so wide that the result is merely confusing. " Utility " does not ordinarily connote various things which are highly to be desired—beauty, for example. It is of course

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possible to say, with Victor Hugo, "the beautiful is as useful as the useful"; but that would be to empty both words of their distinctive meanings, and would leave us with no more guidance than if we had used neither.

This criticism has been regarded almost universally as conclusive; but it does not touch the primary principle from which the Benthamites had started. It was effective against their methods of applying that principle, but not against the principle itself. We may start again from the same point—that things are good or bad according to their total consequences—but may follow afterwards a different course. We may turn aside from the too narrow paths of Utility, Happiness, Pleasure and Pain and enter the open country.

It is true that when we do that we have to take the responsibility of finding our own way. Philosophy can tell us the destination, and the points of the compass, and the experiences of other travellers;



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we have to discover for ourselves the roads that are practicable. But is not that the province of ordinary life rather than of philosophy? To decide from day to day and from generation to generation what particular aims are good, and then to act so as best to attain them—the science and art of living are just that and nothing else.

The general guidance which philosophic thought can give was summed up long ago by the Buddha. It is recorded that on a certain occasion some inhabitants of Kalama came to him and said : “ Many Brahmins and ascetics come to us and propound their different systems. This raises doubts in us and we do not know what to believe.” Thereupon the Buddha said : “ It is proper and very natural that doubts should arise in you ; blind belief is to be rejected. Do not judge by hearsay, nor by tradition, nor on mere assertion, nor on the authority of so-called sacred writings, nor by logical deductions, nor by methodical derivation, nor by the mere evidence of the senses, nor by long-accustomed

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opinions and conceptions ; do not judge according to appearances, nor believe anything because an ascetic or teacher has said it. But when you yourselves perceive : ‘ these things are wrong, these things are objectionable, these things when done produce woe and suffering for us and others,’ then reject them. But when you perceive : ‘ these things are right, these things are unobjectionable, these things when done produce weal and happiness for us and others,’ then adopt them and act accordingly.”

## CHAPTER III

### SELF AND OTHERS

THE proposition which I would offer in this chapter is that welfare is promoted both by self-interest and by social interest, each in its proper measure ; a sound system of ethics will approve both egoism and altruism, and its practical task is to find the right balance between them.

There are, however, many writers on moral philosophy who take a different view. Kant held that an action only acquires real moral worth when it is done from duty and not from inclination. In our own day Professor Hobhouse speaks of self-interest as "something essentially non-moral." Westermarck says much the same. And Mr. Walter Lippmann says : "It can be shown, I think, that those qualities which civilized men . . . have agreed

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to call virtues, have disinterestedness as their inner principle. . . . It is not accounted a virtue if a man eats when he is hungry or goes to bed when he is ill."

This view, I suggest, is not to be accepted. There are duties which are not the less duties because it is to our interest to perform them. A sound popular instinct says, "a man has duties to himself." If a hungry man perversely refused to eat, or a sick man to go to bed, we should tell him, and rightly, that it was his duty to do so. "No one," says Spinoza, "can desire to be happy, to act well and live well, who does not at the same time desire to be, to act and to live, that is to say, actually to exist. No virtue can be conceived prior to this, the endeavour, namely, after self-preservation." And Herbert Spencer, asserting that the preservation of health is a duty, declares that "there is such a thing as physical morality."

It is obvious that there are forms of

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self-interest which are anti-social, but there are others which are not. By seeking his own interest, as embodied in his own health, education, efficiency, in the realization of full personality—the individual is serving the community as well. As John Stuart Mill expressed it : “ In proportion to the development of his individuality, each person becomes more valuable to himself, and is therefore capable of being more valuable to others. There is a greater fulness of life about his own existence, and when there is more life in the units there is more in the mass which is composed of them.” Parents do not help their children best by sacrificing altogether their own standards of living in the hope of raising theirs. A generation which sought to promote the welfare of the next generation by never caring for its own, would fail in its aim. The people of the nineteenth century would have been of little service to the twentieth if they had not developed their own civilization for their own sakes. Each age is momentous

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to itself, and each individual to himself also.

Further, the doctrine that my duty is to be found in seeking only my neighbour's welfare, and not my own, is irrational. The same rule must apply to my neighbour also ; he has a duty to promote my welfare. But why should he do so, unless my welfare is a good thing in itself ? And if it is, have not I too the duty to promote it ?

The command of the Old Testament "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," with its endorsement in the New Testament "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you do ye even so to them," has been accepted by the greater part of civilized mankind as the highest of ethical precepts ; but that precept does not exclude a legitimate care for one's own rights and interests. It does not say thou shalt care for thy neighbour and not for thyself. It says precisely the opposite ; it takes love for oneself, and what one would wish others to do for one's own benefit, as the

very standard of duty to the others. Self-interest, in fact, is made the measure of altruism.

True that religious teachers and moralists of all schools have always emphasized the "other-regarding virtues" rather than the "self-regarding virtues." Men have so strong a natural tendency to seek whatever their own immediate interest requires that it is the other part of their duties which most needs support from outside. It is not necessary to educate people to do what they already wish to do because they expect to gain a direct advantage by it ; what is necessary is to teach them that they ought sometimes to do things which they do not wish to do, and from which they will gain no immediate advantage. None the less there are many occasions on which an action which one wishes to take, and which will bring a direct benefit, is in fact a good action, and one that ought to be taken. Ethics is concerned with right conduct—not one part of right conduct but the whole of it, and must not

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take into account only that part of conduct which needs the support of moral propaganda. It is amusing, but untrue, to say, "La morale, c'est faire les choses ennuyeuses."

It is clear, however, that this is only part of the picture. "Man," as Aristotle said, "is a social animal." We can hardly envisage a human individual at all except in relation to a society. The man is dependent upon the community—physically, because it nurtures him, and because it may expose him to disease or save him from it; mentally, because it gives him access to knowledge; economically, because of the division of labour. If social relationships were absent "the life of man would be solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short." But a community cannot exist unless its members are ready to accommodate themselves to one another, and to subordinate, when necessary, personal interest to the general interest. If each pushed to the extreme his own advantage,



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the community would fall and the welfare of everyone would perish with it.

The view prevailed widely in the nineteenth century that a regard for self-interest alone would in practice work out favourably to social interest ; but experience showed that that was not so. As Professor Whitehead says, " the mere doctrines of freedom, individualism, and competition, had produced a resurgence of something very like industrial slavery at the base of society." Generations grew up, illiterate, overworked, poverty-stricken. Towns grew up, ugly and mean, inconvenient and unhealthy. Life tended to become more and more materialized and commercialized. Those who ranked economic values above intellectual or spiritual, meeting no check in any quarter, became predominant. Egoism did not in fact work out as altruism. Welfare in the total was not being served. The conclusion became clear that, if you could not shut out self-interest, so also you could not leave it unguided and uncontrolled. Social interest must enter also, and the only

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question is how each may best serve the other.

Let us consider one or two examples of the inter-relation of egoism and altruism.

A man walking along the sea-shore sees a child struggling in shallow water and in danger of being drawn out by the tide ; he can save the child's life at no greater cost to himself than a wetting ; it is obvious that it is his duty to do so. Egoism hardly comes into the matter and altruism is predominant. But suppose that the child is already some way out ; the passer-by is an average swimmer but no more ; there is some risk that he may himself be carried out to sea ; self-interest pulls one way, sympathy and humanity the other. There would probably be a consensus of opinion that it would be right for him to make the attempt and to run the risk. Consider now a third case ; a storm is raging ; a crowd of people are watching a vessel with sailors on board, which has been driven on to the rocks ; no human being could

possibly swim with a rope through the breakers ; if one of the crowd, animated by a complete disregard of self, were to volunteer to attempt it, the judgement should clearly be that, in the conditions stated, his proposed action would be wrong ; he would be merely sacrificing yet another life ; his deed might be heroic but would be irrational ; it would be the duty of the bystanders to restrain him. If, however, he persisted and they did not stop him and he was drowned, as it was clear that he would be, his action might be admired as courageous but would be condemned as morally wrong. Altruism would have been carried too far.

Consider the exceptional case of a man who has in him a capacity for leadership or powers of original genius. It is his duty to make his abilities known and to win scope for his activities. For him, self-realization rather than self-sacrifice is to be counted virtuous. The spirit expressed by Blake or Carlyle is more proper in his case than a spirit of renunciation.

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Egoism—not indeed uncontrolled, not expressing itself in ways that are injurious to society—may be the quality best justified in his case, may best conduce to the welfare of a community which perhaps is starved for genius and for leadership.

In politics issues are continually arising as to the extent to which the individual citizens may rightly be called upon to sacrifice their personal welfare to what is regarded as the welfare of the community. Not every call is to be accepted. History is full of examples of bad rulers summoning their subjects to make sacrifices for purposes that are seen afterwards to have been unnecessary or harmful ; the citizens would have rendered the best service if they had refused, had insisted instead upon a change of policy, and perhaps a change of rulers. And not every call is to be rejected, for that, as has been said, would mean the dissolution of society. It is quite clear that individual cases must be judged upon their merits, and politics

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largely consists in forming and applying such judgements.

It is sometimes asked whether the object to be pursued is the perfection of the individual or the perfection of the society. But that is an idle question ; just as it would be idle to ask whether it is the bulb or the soil which produces the flower. It is the bulb *in* the soil, and it is obviously the perfection of the individual *in* the society which is the object to be pursued.

Yet in the final analysis it is the individual alone that is in question ; we seek to perfect society for his sake and not the other way about. " Society " is indeed no more than a word which conveniently expresses the notion of persons organized together in a certain way for common purposes. Without that organization they themselves, it is true, would be different and inferior ; but apart from the persons the society does not exist. It is not possible here to pursue a subject which opens up a wide field of philosophical controversy. I would only express the conviction that

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the idea that "Society" or "the State" is a reality, and is entitled to unlimited devotion for its own sake, is merely the product of the imagination of metaphysicians running loose in a vacuum, and has no true relation to the actual life of men living in communities. It is an idea, moreover, which, so far as it has won acceptance, has done, and is doing, great harm. Nor does the term "Society" as used in moral philosophy correspond with the term "State" as used in politics. The social factor may be a different thing in different applications. It may be, for example, the welfare or reputation of a family, as against the immediate interest of one member of it; or it may be the joint interest of some corporate body, such as a trade union, or a manufacturers' association; or it may in fact be the national interest, with which it is often assumed to be identified; or it may pass beyond that and be the interest of the human race as a whole. In the modern world that is often the case, and when we speak of social welfare we may

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often mean nothing less than the welfare of all mankind.

The conclusion is, then, that out of the mutual inter-action of self-interest and social interest comes the moral code. There are poets who have clearly discerned this. Robert Bridges' great work *The Testament of Beauty* is divided into three parts, which he entitles "Self-hood," "Breed" and "Ethick." "Self-hood" is the individual factor, "Breed" is the social factor, and the theme of the poem is that they combine to create "Ethick," which is morality. And Pope wrote in the *Essay on Man* :

So two consistent motions act <sup>1</sup> the Soul ;  
And one regards Itself, and one the Whole.  
Thus God and Nature link'd the general frame,  
And bade Self-love and Social be the same.

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<sup>1</sup> Actuate.

## CHAPTER IV

### IS THERE FREE WILL ?

WE can now pass on from our first question, In what does right and wrong consist ? and examine the second question, Why should men prefer the one to the other ? But when we get to close quarters with it we shall soon find ourselves in difficulties unless we had already dealt with one preliminary point. We are obliged first to consider whether men really have a moral responsibility for their acts at all. May not everything that they do be determined by prior causes ? If so, is any real choice open between right and wrong ? Is conduct of any kind a matter for praise or blame ? We cannot escape the problem, which has vexed the mind of man all through the centuries, of Determinism and Free Will.



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This is not a mere abstract philosophical puzzle which may be the subject of an interesting argument in the study. It is a living, practical issue. It faces the legislator, the lawyer, the ordinary citizen, every hour. For example, if a man commits a crime and it is found that he has lived from birth in bad surroundings, it seems natural to say, "That man has not had a chance ; he has never had a parent's control or proper education or a helping-hand ; he has never had regular employment or a settled home ; how could it be expected that he would turn out other than he has done ? Society is more to blame than he is. To punish him is not true justice." The criminal himself may advance that plea. In 1930 the House of Commons appointed a Select Committee to inquire into the question of Capital Punishment ; one of the witnesses before the Committee had been a Commissioner of Prisons in Scotland ; in the course of his evidence he said : " Taking some of the young prisoners I have had talks with,

they persistently defend their attitude. . . . They tell you it is no use talking to them about reform. They say : ' I didn't make myself ; I didn't ask to be brought into the world,' and that kind of thing. . . . They think they are talking philosophy when they are talking nonsense. That is a common thing outside prison walls as well as in. They are determinists of a kind. A man says : ' Well I can't help it : that's the way I'm made. I couldn't help doing it,' and that sort of thing." The witness added : " I say to them : ' I will be giving you three days bread and water. That's the way I'm made.' And they can see that. It is a poor way of answering, but when he gets an answer like that he can understand it."

Is there a better answer ? Or must it be admitted that there is not any rational reply to the defence made by the criminal ? The same kind of problem, though perhaps not so clear-cut, presents itself constantly in all the relations of daily life.

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Science, by establishing the Law of Causality, laid the foundation for determinism. Every event is preceded by earlier events ; if they had been absent the later event would not have occurred ; if they had been different, the later event would have been correspondingly different ; the earlier stand to the later in the relation of cause to effect. Further, there has been established the Law of Uniformity in nature ; the same causes will always produce the same effects.

It is true that there are at the present time some physicists, of whom the leading representative in Great Britain is Sir Arthur Eddington, who deny this uniformity. Basing themselves mainly upon some hitherto unexplained facts in the behaviour of electrons within the atom, they declare that there is at work a " Principle of Uncertainty " ; that chance reigns at the heart of nature ; and, further, that this has a bearing upon the question of human free will. If there is no law, says Sir Arthur Eddington, regulating the

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most elementary processes of nature, why should we suppose that there is any law regulating the highest and most complicated processes ? But other physicists, of at least equal authority, by no means accept this proposition. Professor Einstein, the originator of the Theory of Relativity ; Professor Planck, the originator of the Quantum Theory ; Lord Rutherford, the pioneer in the discoveries of the structure of the atom ; Sir Oliver Lodge and many more, consider it either unsound or unproven. The layman has been given as yet no sufficient reason to abandon the principle of the uniformity in the sequence of events in nature, a principle that has been tested by innumerable experiments in every field of science during centuries of investigation, without a single exception having been established until now.

If that be accepted as the starting-point given by science, the question that arises for philosophy is whether the human mind and human conduct are to be regarded as within “ nature ” ; whether the Law of

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Causality and the Law of Uniformity apply in that sphere as they apply elsewhere. There is a strong prejudice against believing that they do. Yet it is difficult—I think it is impossible—to find any rational support for a negative view. The universe includes mind and nature includes man. You cannot divide the universe or nature into two parts, saying that in one part everything that happens is the outcome of causes and under the rule of law, and that in the other part events may happen which are uncaused, spontaneous, autonomous, arbitrary. He would be a rash man who would venture to say where the boundary would lie between them.

Nevertheless, the great majority of mankind do undoubtedly believe that, in some mysterious, and indeed inexplicable, fashion the human will is free, in the sense that human actions are exempt from causation. At the same time they do not act upon that belief. Take again the example of crime. Experience shows us that if a nation gives to its children a good general

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education and a sound moral training, and secures to its adults a regular livelihood in comfortable circumstances, fewer individuals in that nation will choose to commit crimes than if the conditions were otherwise. A wise society sets to work to establish such conditions so far as practicable, with the expectation that conduct will in fact prove itself amenable to causes and that crime will diminish. So with regard to social effort in general. If we really believed that every human action was the outcome of an undetermined choice, uninfluenced by prior causes, what would be the use of the training of infants, of school education, of religious discipline, of the inculcation of good habits of any kind? Why should we attach importance to eugenics, or to any measures of social reform? With it all, on this theory, each individual would act in the same way as without it.

And yet . . .

We feel sure that we do in fact choose freely between this and that from hour to

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hour and from minute to minute. We feel sure that we could, if we had wished, have taken a course on any occasion different from that which we did take. We cannot doubt that there must be some answer to the criminal who repudiates personal responsibility and claims to escape punishment because he had acted from necessity. We see that if such claims were once admitted, the whole social system would collapse. Common sense is with Dr. Johnson when he said, " Sir, we *know* the will is free, and there's an end on't."

That is our problem. It seems as though an irresistible argument—Determinism—is meeting an immovable fact—Free Will. What is to happen ? Until we have decided whether men, in any event, have or have not the power to act rightly it is useless to discuss for what reasons they should act rightly.

If—here again—we treat in isolation the act and the choice which precedes it, the dilemma is indeed insoluble. If, as is

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usually done in this discussion, a section is cut, so to speak, in the continuous flow of events at a particular moment in time when a choice is being made, and the problem is supposed to originate as from that moment, then we cannot expect to arrive at a satisfactory result. But—as we saw when we were discussing “ motives ” and “ consequences ”—any such limitation is artificial ; it is an arbitrary departure from the facts of actual life. We are entitled for that reason to refuse to accept the conditions in which the problem is usually set. The choice which precedes the act is not the real starting-point. We must go farther back, and when we do that we may find the way of escape from the dilemma.

A person chooses between this and that, and when he does so his will is acting freely. Let that be accepted. But what is this Personality, what is this Will, that choose and act ? They are themselves the result of prior causes. You say, “ I have freedom of choice,” and that is quite true. But what is the meaning of “ I ” ?



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Geological causes have produced the globe on which we live, and biological causes the human race to which we belong ; we are bound to act as men, and are not free to act as the insects, or the birds, or the beasts of the forest and the field. Historical causes have produced the nation of which we are members, and have endowed us with the characteristics of that nation. Genealogical causes give each of us our family characteristics, and will tend to make us act in accordance with them. Our environment, our education, our wealth or our poverty, help to mould us. Each human personality, then, is the outcome of causes—of thousands, millions of causes, spreading out and stretching back through time, beyond the range of computation and even of imagination ; crowding upon each other and intermingling ; sometimes reinforcing one another, sometimes in mutual opposition ; some powerful, some weak ; some beneficial, some harmful. What a man does depends upon what he wills. What he

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will depends upon what he is. What he is depends upon these prior causes, infinite in number.

But this is not to say that a personality is a mere bundle of effects. It is something very different. The effects subsist, but they have been fused into a new entity. There is nothing there but the product of a multitude of prior causes ; yet that product has a unity of its own ; it is a new " whole " ; it becomes, itself, a cause of other effects. Viewing the matter forward from the moment of choice and looking into the future, we see the operation of a free will ; but viewing it backward from the moment of choice, and looking into a limitless past, we see the operation of causality. The present is both effect and cause. It is the effect of all the past. It is the cause of all the future.

In other words, my choice now is free, but the " I " that chooses is the result of past causes. My choice is the outcome of my character, and my character has been determined by those past causes.

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As Schopenhauer expressed it, "A man can surely do what he wills to do, but he cannot determine what he wills." That is to say, the will which chooses is as much the product of causes as anything else.

Are we then reduced to saying that the freedom of the will is an illusion—an illusion from which we may not be able to escape, but still an illusion ? I do not think so. It is real—for us, and in the practical conditions of our daily lives.

Our bodies—for us—are solid flesh and bone, and that is not illusion. Yet we have learnt to know that they are in fact made up of infinitesimal electric charges revolving with inconceivable rapidity ; they are as easily penetrable by X-rays or by wireless rays as the "solid" glass of a window is penetrable by rays of light. When we sit down we know that we are stationary, and that is really so—for us. Yet all the time we are travelling with the earth through space a hundred times faster than the speed of a rifle bullet. So we conduct our lives on the basis that

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the will is free—and so it is, relatively to ourselves and to our conduct to one another.

We are obliged in ordinary conditions to treat each person as though he were, so to speak, “a fresh start.” When we meet a friend in the street we do not stay to analyse the causes which have made him what he is. We say—here is John Smith. We carry on relations with him from that as a starting-point. We cannot attempt to go into the immense complex of prior causes ; we do not know, except quite generally, what they are ; nor does he. As a rule we cannot predict—nor can he—what their outcome will be when he chooses between particular courses on a particular occasion. It is because of that ignorance and that inability that the choice for John Smith—for his own personality, such as it is, at that moment—is an open one. If he had been omniscient, as to his own origin, his own past, his own character, the choice would not have been “free.” But he is not omniscient. As

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Spinoza said, " Man thinks himself free because he is conscious of his wishes and appetites, whilst at the same time he is ignorant of the causes by which he is led to wish and desire, not dreaming what they are."

Let us examine this point a little more closely. "As a rule" we cannot predict the choice that will be made. But sometimes we can ; or at all events we can say what are the probabilities. Sometimes we may succeed in disentangling one set of influences from the rest, and identifying certain results that usually follow from them ; and we are accustomed to do that in practice when we are able. For example, national characteristics and training play an important part in determining action. In a shipwreck, if the crew consists of men of one nationality, with certain race characteristics and a certain training, we may expect them to act with courage and resource and without panic ; if they are of another nationality, lacking those qualities, the conduct may be expected to

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be different. Each man in either crew has free choice as to his actions, but most of the individuals belonging to one set would in fact be found to act in one way, most of the others in a different way. Two armies confront one another, one drawn from a soldierly race, well trained and disciplined, the other drawn from a race without martial qualities and consisting of raw recruits ; each soldier in each army will either fight or run ; but everyone can tell beforehand that the one army will advance and the other will retreat.

So in an individual case. I meet John Smith and I may be considering whether I should enter into some business transaction with him. I know that, as a human being, he can choose freely whether to treat me honestly or dishonestly ; but if I am aware that he is one of a family with a bad commercial reputation and that he himself has been a fraudulent bankrupt, I should be inclined to say that he may very possibly choose to treat me dishonestly ; someone else, who did not have those dis-

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abilities, would be less likely to do so. I might prove to be wrong. There is no certainty about the matter. If the transaction were entered into, he might perhaps carry it out quite conscientiously. But the probabilities seem to be the other way ; and I should in fact prefer to make the contract with another person.

It is because of considerations such as these that it is worth while to train children, to carry out any kind of social activity. Although we cannot be sure—on account of the fact of free will—that in the case of any particular individual such influences will have the effect that is desired, yet we know from experience that, we are originating sets of causes, which will work in with many others, and will play their proportionate part in moulding the characters which will decide the acts.

There are two valid answers that may be given to the young criminal who says that he is merely the product of circumstances, that he has not been able, and

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will in future not be able, to do other than he is doing, and that it is both useless and unjust to subject him to punishment. The first answer is that what he says is untrue. Prior causes have given him a character that has made him yield to the temptation to commit crimes, but they have also given him a conscious will which, by an effort, might enable him to resist the temptation. As likely as not his own brother, with a similar inheritance and a similar environment, is not a criminal. Very many people, who have committed crimes, do in fact liberate themselves from their past and change their way of life.

The second answer is that the probable consequences of an action form one of the factors in the matter. The anticipation of those consequences affects the mind of the agent prior to the action. The influence may be strong or weak, decisive or not, according to the circumstances and to the person's character ; but the influence is there. Imagine a man of the criminal



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type contemplating a burglary. If he can be quite sure that he will not be caught and sent to prison, we may suppose that he will certainly do it ; if there is a serious risk, he will hesitate, and may commit the burglary or not ; if there is a certainty that he will be caught and punished, he will not commit it. There is no room to doubt that, if police forces were to be abolished, and if no one were ever prosecuted for an offence and no one ever sentenced, the number of persons who in the exercise of their freedom of choice, would choose to commit crimes would be far greater than it is now ; the general welfare would suffer in consequence. When it is said that the existence of the police and of the penal law did not stop A B from choosing to commit a crime, to which he was impelled by prior causes and on account of which he is now serving a term of imprisonment, it may be answered that that is quite true ; but that C D and E F have not committed crimes, and that the existence of the police and of the penal law has been

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part of the complex of causes which has led them to choose not to commit crimes.

It is often thought that to admit any element of determinism is to accept a creed of fatalism. But it will be seen that the position taken here is not fatalist. It is the very opposite of fatalist. It holds that human conduct, like physical events, is the result of prior causes, but it does not accept the deduction that individual men are mere flotsam on an ocean of necessity, rising and falling with the tides, drifting with the currents here and there. It holds, on the contrary, that out of the vast congeries of prior causes—which includes the whole evolution of the human race—there have emerged conscious will, character, power of choice ; there has emerged the capacity to set on foot new causes, which in their turn will achieve, for good or ill, further results. Individual moral responsibility remains. “ You talk of Fate ! ” said Meredith, “ It is the seed we sow

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individually or collectively.” “ Character is Fate,” said Novalis.

But the emphasis laid upon the fact of ultimate causation makes it clear why it is right and why it is useful to secure, so far as we can, that the social causes which help to mould the future shall be well planned and beneficent. Those who accept the principles here advanced would find in them, not a justification for a fatalistic apathy, but rather a spur to a more intense activity.

Nor is the position truly open to the charge, sometimes made, that it is a reversion to a materialist philosophy now generally discredited. To hold that mind is within the universe and man part of nature, and that both are subject to the Laws of Causality and of Uniformity, is not to hold that there is no difference between mind and matter and that human conduct is subject merely to physical forces. The influences which affect thought and conduct are themselves largely mental, and often operate from within ; the forces

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which affect matter are purely physical and external. But there may be causality in the one case as in the other. To argue convincingly against materialism is not to prove a case against the universality of causation. The two questions are separate. And to say—matter is subject to causation ; mind and conduct are different from matter ; therefore mind and conduct are not subject to causation—that would be the most obvious of logical fallacies.

## CHAPTER V

### DUTY AND INCLINATION

COMING now to the question why people should do what is right and not do what is wrong, we see at once that there is no difficulty in giving the answer as respects one large class of right actions. They are the actions which will conduce to the immediate advantage of the person concerned. Examples have been given of acts which bring benefit to oneself and which it is also one's duty to do. They need not occupy us here ; since it is to the interest of the agent to act rightly and he has no inducement to do otherwise, the reason for right action is self-evident.

The problem for consideration is why people should act rightly in that class of cases where it is not to their direct advantage to do so, where it may even be to

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their disadvantage. In seeking an answer we shall be well advised, here again, not to try to create out of our own reasoning some *a priori* theory, but rather to go to life as it is lived. Let us see why it is that men do in practice often, though not always, behave rightly, when they might gain an immediate advantage by doing otherwise.

At once it becomes apparent that it is not a single motive which influences them but a variety of motives. Some of these will be accounted worthy and some unworthy; some will have influence with one man and some with another; sometimes one among them will predominate and settle the matter; sometimes there will be a combination of motives, and sometimes a conflict, when the resultant of several forces pulling different ways will decide the outcome.

Let us take a concrete illustration. Consider a form of dishonesty which used formerly to be fairly common, the adulteration of foods. No one will doubt that

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it is wrong for a tradesman to put water into the milk he sells, or sand into the sugar. Nevertheless, some tradesmen have done so. Others have not. Why have they not?

With one man the sufficient reason will be that he is honest. He knows that it is dishonest to make a profit by deceiving his customers, and selling them articles which are not what they think they are buying, which are inferior and may be deleterious. His inheritance, his training, perhaps his religious beliefs, lead him to value honesty for its own sake. He would be ashamed to do a dishonourable thing. Without considering the matter from any other point of view, that is enough for him. He does not sell adulterated goods because he is "a man of principle."

His competitor in the next street may also be honest in his trading, but for a different reason. He believes that honesty pays. He belongs to the large class of people who accept the maxim that "honesty is the best policy," and act upon it. In other words, he is ready to

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sacrifice any immediate financial advantage to himself that might be gained by selling adulterated goods for the sake of some greater advantage to himself that will be gained by not doing so. Such benefit may be of various kinds. It may be financial ; he may think his business will prosper best if he is relied upon as an honest man ; selling bad goods might prove to be the road to ruin. It may be social ; he may care about his reputation, with his family, his friends, the people of the town ; honesty will bring its reward in the respect of others, possibly in the conferment of positions of dignity ; dishonesty, sooner or later, would forfeit esteem, with consequences which he would regret. Or the benefit may be connected with his religious faith ; he may believe that honesty will be rewarded and dishonesty penalized in some metaphysical manner, either in this world or in another world, or in both ; he, personally, will gain or lose accordingly.

A third tradesman would be dishonest if



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he dared. He is restrained mainly by the laws against adulteration. He is of the class who, before such laws were passed, did in fact put water into the milk and sand into the sugar. Now he is afraid of being detected and prosecuted. If that were to happen he would not only have to pay a fine, but in addition his business might be seriously injured by the publicity and the discredit, and he might lose his livelihood.

The motives, then, are various. There is simple virtue—caring for good for its own sake. And there are the several forms of indirect self-interest ; a later benefit is expected which will more than compensate for the immediate sacrifice. That benefit may be material ; or it may be social, springing from care for reputation or “ love of fame ” ; or it may be conferred through a supernatural agency ; or it may be security from punishment at the hands of the law.

Is it possible to simplify the matter by resolving all these various motives into

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one ? There is a “ philosophic craving for unity ” which has always striven to do that. Philosophers have tried to find “ *the* basis for ethics,” as though it must necessarily be single, in the same way that they have tried to define “ *the* good.” Some would persuade us—as has already been mentioned—that the sole motive for moral action is to be found in promoting the welfare of others, and that actions taken in one’s own interest, however legitimate they may be, must therefore be considered, for the sake of the theory, not to be “ moral.” It is as though one should say that an action which benefits oneself directly, and does no harm to others, which everyone agrees to be right and which everyone does as a matter of course, is, for that very reason, not to be considered right in a philosophical sense ! Other writers take the opposite view, and seek to find an indirect egoistic motive for every altruistic act ; they seek to show that duty and interest are the same, because every duty is really an interest. But this theory also

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does not conform to the facts which we see about us.

It is true to say that it is to the interest of "the individual" to do all that is in his power to promote the welfare of society ; but we are speaking there of a generalized abstract "individual," not of any particular person on any particular occasion. There may be persons who have to be called upon definitely to sacrifice their own advantage, on certain occasions, for the sake of society. That is perfectly understood and constantly done. To say that they are really promoting their own interests by sacrificing them is a straining of words. It is like the provisions in the constitution of a certain imaginary country drawn up by a modern satirist : "The citizens must understand that they exist only to do service to the State ; for the State is themselves. They must be prepared to sacrifice their liberty of action and opinion to it both in peace and war. In peace the citizens must consent to surrender all their possessions, if required, for the benefit of the State, which

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is (in a larger sense) their own benefit ; and in war they must be content to be killed as the best means (in the wider outlook) of self-preservation."

When we ask why people should do that which they ought to do, it is useless, in many cases, to answer that we are appealing only to the motive of self-interest. If that motive were adequate, no one would ever do wrong. While in the study we may be thinking of the interest in the long run of an abstract citizen animated by enlightened motives, in the street and the market-place we have to deal in practice with the interests of ordinary persons, as they themselves see them, and as affecting them in the short run. There is often a discordance between the two, and our immediate problem arises out of that discordance. If a man who is poverty-stricken has the chance of stealing some article of value without risk of detection, it is his duty not to steal. It is also, no doubt, his ultimate interest not to steal ; partly owing to the effect of an act of dis-

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honesty on his own character and self-esteem, partly because he will prosper best in a society of honest men, and such a society requires that all the members of it, of whom he is one, should be honest. But his immediate interest is to relieve his poverty by stealing. At all events, he may think so, with the result that sometimes men do in fact steal.

There is constantly a difference between Duty and Inclination, between doing what we ought to do and doing what we would like to do ; and it is mere sophistry to say that, "in the long run," or "rightly viewed," the two are identical. That may often be true, but sometimes it is not. And where it is true, the motive is frequently not adequate to control conduct.

The argument sometimes takes a more subtle form. It is said : "Anything that I do is what I have decided to do ; what I decide to do can only be what I wish to do ; and whatever I wish to do must be for my own advantage, as I interpret that advantage at the time, for otherwise I

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should not be wishing it." Such reasoning would lead to the conclusion that a man who, in a shipwreck, gives up his place in a boat to a woman, or a martyr who goes to the stake rather than recant his faith, are acting out of regard for their own interests. This offends against common sense, and philosophies based upon these principles have never won the assent of the ordinary man.

It is difficult to see the reason for these attempts—repeated again and again from the time of Plato to our own—to force the facts to fit a preconceived theory of unity. Why need we assume that all the influences that prompt to right action can ultimately be resolved into one? Why should we feel obliged to show, either that all altruism is really a form of egoism; or else that all egoism is really a form of altruism (or, if it is not, that it is to be excluded, for that reason, from the purview of ethics altogether)? Both may be valid; both may be real "in their own right." Just as, when we were considering the various

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kinds of "goods," we found that some actions were good because their results were beneficial to the agent and some because their results were beneficial to others, and that, for many purposes, the two could be considered separately, so now we may reach the conclusion that the reasons why men should act rightly may be broadly grouped into two similar categories. Egoism and altruism are both fundamental to morals. It is true that several motives which appear at first sight to be altruistic, and are constantly so considered are really egoistic—such as the conviction that "honesty is the best policy," or the righteousness that springs from the hope of a divine reward and from the fear of retribution. But not all can be so resolved. Unification would do violence to the facts, and it must therefore be surrendered.

Innate, not only in human, but in animal nature generally, are both the instinct of self-preservation or self-advantage,

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and the instinct of affection, sympathy, self-sacrifice. Animals will fly from danger, for the sake of self-preservation ; but if they have young they will often stand and face the danger. They will run risks in the endeavour to protect their offspring, although as individuals they have nothing to gain, directly or indirectly, by their action. Ants and bees will sacrifice themselves unhesitatingly for the sake of the colony or the hive. Birds build nests, and it is difficult to discover any egoistic motive which would account for their doing so. In a previous chapter I have recalled the fact that co-operation, equally with competition, is integral to the evolutionary process. Those individuals that lack the instinct of altruism, at all events in its most primitive form of the care for offspring, do not, from the nature of the case, leave progeny that survive, and cannot therefore be progenitors of a species. In the course of evolution this instinct is carried forward into man.

“When we come to human society,”



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says Professor Hobhouse, "we find the basis for a social organization of life already laid in the animal nature of man. Like others of the higher animals, man is a gregarious beast. . . . His loves and hates, his joys and sorrows, his pride, his wrath, his gentleness, his boldness, his timidity—all these permanent qualities, which run through humanity and vary only in degree, belong to his inherited structure. Broadly speaking, they are of the nature of instincts."

Among these, sociality is one of the most powerful and most significant. The social instinct reveals itself at once in the affections of infancy and childhood. Overlaid though it often is by the sophistications of civilized societies, the instinct persists. It runs through life side by side with the instinct of self-preservation and self-interest. The moral philosopher must accept them both as given facts ; as the physiologist must accept as given the facts that we have two eyes or two hands, or that there are two sexes.

It may be asked whether what is said

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here with regard to the importance of instincts is not in contradiction with what was said earlier as to the non-acceptance of intuition—which is a form of instinct—as a determining factor in right conduct. No contradiction need be admitted. Instinct cannot be a safe guide in the intricate complexities of social relations. We recognize that it is the initial force in our activities, but we recognize also that, in most cases, it can and it ought to be controlled and directed by reason. Experience, reflection, training enter in. Instinct is not a power which is autocratic and irresistible. A man, describing some emergency, will often say, “I was instinctively inclined to do so-and-so, but a moment’s reflection showed me that it would be a mistake.” All considered action, indeed all civilization, is the modification of instinct by reason. Subtract that control and man reverts to the animal level.

Seeking why it is that men do act rightly—when they do—we may arrive,

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then, at these conclusions. Right actions may be divided into three classes. There are those which bring immediate benefit to the agent ; he will do such actions for that reason. There are those which are not to his immediate benefit, but which he believes will bring him some kind of indirect gain that, in his opinion, will more than outweigh any direct loss ; he will do such actions also from an egoistic motive. And there are those which will bring him, personally, no benefit that he can perceive, direct or indirect, immediate or ultimate, or which will even cause him evident harm ; he will do these actions—if he does them—from motives of affection, sympathy, goodwill, sense of duty, from the altruistic motive, whatever form it may take.

It should be added that there are obviously many actions which partake partly of one character and partly of another, and that a man will often take a right course from mixed motives. And acts of passion or unreason have not been

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included in this analysis ; they stand on a different footing.

We may now go forward to the next stage in the inquiry. The problem for ethics now becomes this—How can the various influences which lead to right conduct be strengthened, and those which lead to wrong conduct be weakened or eliminated, so that welfare may be promoted ?

## CHAPTER VI

### TRAINING AND HABIT

THE chief means upon which mankind may rely to promote good conduct and to deter from bad, is training. Youth is plastic and even age can learn. From the day of birth, through infancy, childhood and adolescence, all kinds of influences are brought to bear upon the individual ; some are continued into maturity and on into old age. There are the direct influences of the family, the school, the church, the occupation ; there are the diffused, pervasive, influences of newspapers, broadcasting, books, entertainments—all the various means by which a community, deliberately or at haphazard, impresses ideas upon its members. All of them together set a standard of conduct. The standard may be high or low ; if it

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is high it will produce a worthy civilization, and the average citizen will be of good conduct ; and the opposite if the social standard is low.

Of great importance in this connection is Habit. Psychologists have shown us that a large part of our actions are directed by functions in our minds which are subconscious ; and indeed this is plain from ordinary observation. When we walk, or eat, or speak, the conscious will determines where we walk, what we eat or what we say, but the physical movements themselves take place “ automatically ” ; that is to say they are controlled by brain-functions which do not call into play our conscious will. Any action continually repeated, becomes a matter of habit ; it passes into the subconscious ; we act without giving attention to our action. There is a physical reason for this : “ our nervous system grows into the modes in which it had been exercised.”

The same “ force of habit ” appears in matters much less elementary than walking,

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eating or speaking. An English motorist will drive as a matter of course on the left side of the road without thinking about it, just as a French motorist will drive on the right. If either goes for a motor tour in the other country, he has to make a deliberate effort of will to change his practice; he must continue to give conscious attention to the point until he has become accustomed to the different rule; his action then again becomes habit, though a different habit; it reverts to the sub-conscious.

A company of soldiers at the end of three years' training is very different from what it was at the beginning. The men may be the same persons, but the constant drill, the continual repetition of the same actions in obedience to the same commands, the custom of acting together as one body—these influences have formed habits. The result of the military discipline is that the men move at command "almost instinctively." So also, in large measure, with the moral discipline that is given in childhood and youth.

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The ordinary person, trained in a family, a school, a social environment, in which honesty is a normal condition, becomes himself honest as a matter of habit. If he happens to see some passer-by with a note-case protruding from his pocket, he does not begin to cogitate whether it would or would not be safe to steal it. He either does nothing, or he warns the passer-by that he may be losing his note-case. But another person, who has been brought up under different influences, with whom honesty has not become a sub-conscious habit, who may indeed himself have committed thefts already, will begin to think whether it is safe to steal the note-case, and may decide to do so.

A proverb says truly that habit is second nature. It may be a force of great social value. As Professor Bergson wrote, "The habit of forming habits is at the base of societies and a condition of their existence ; its force is comparable to that of instinct."

But there is another side to be considered also. The formation of good habits, re-



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sulting in right actions, is by no means the only thing that is necessary to well-being. Everyone recognizes that character is of prime importance ; and there are many other elements in character besides a response to discipline and a capacity to absorb into the subconscious the results of past influences. Self-reliance, initiative, the power to choose the right course by one's own knowledge and to follow it by one's own volition, these also are elements, and prime elements, in well-being. A form of training which eliminated these, in order to make certain of good conduct, would clearly be harmful on balance. A social system that succeeded in making its people well behaved at the cost of keeping them enslaved, ignorant and apathetic, would be a bad social system. It may be argued that at all events it would be inducing men to act so as to bring good results and not bad, and that therefore the " doctrine of consequences " should justify it. To this the answer is obvious—the very production of a population of a degraded type would

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have been in itself the worst of consequences ; to continue to produce further generations that were no better would lessen human welfare and not increase it. Goods and bads must be weighed against each other. Sparta had elements of greatness, but her system had elements of baseness also. The civilization of Athens was richer and nobler. Our own civilization will not reach the heights of well-being until there come the generations

“ With flame of freedom in their souls  
And light of knowledge in their eyes.”

Training, then, must not sacrifice, for the sake of forming good habits, the native energy and power of will which each personality brings with him into the world. The best father is not he who guides every step of his child and shields him from all possibility of harm. He is not the best schoolmaster who adopts the methods of the drill-sergeant. Nor is it the best form of government which imposes efficiency at the cost of liberty.

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Here we approach the problem which is the province of the educationist. The task of the schoolmaster was regarded in the eighteenth century as consisting almost entirely in the imparting of knowledge ; in order to ensure that the teaching should not be wasted it was chiefly necessary to instil into the pupils the habit of industry in the learning of their lessons. In the nineteenth century it was realized that the all-round training of character was of equal, and perhaps of greater, importance. In the twentieth, we are coming to see that, for right character, the development of full and free individuality is essential. A right action is not rightly done unless it is freely done.

A good system of education, then, must combine these various factors—the imparting of knowledge, the formation of habits, the preservation of self-reliance and initiative. How in practice to blend them in their right proportions is the question to which in these days many devoted educationists, in all countries, are actively addressing their minds.

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Among the influences which society can bring to bear in order to promote good conduct and discourage bad, four stand out predominant. One is the home ; to this reference will be made later. Another is the school. The third is religion. The fourth consists in rewards conferred and penalties imposed, either formally by the State or informally by the members of the community themselves.

## CHAPTER VII

### RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES

LOOKING back over the history of mankind it will be plain that the chief agent in promoting morality has been religion. If the child, the youth, the man have to be taught to form habits of right action, to take the long view, to forgo immediate personal gain for the sake of a more distant common advantage, it has been the religious organizations that have been the principal teachers. Among all the races of men, from primitive times on into the modern world, religion has striven to point the way and to strengthen the impulse to moral conduct.

But in our own age this force has clearly been weakening. East or West, wherever we look, we see a growing divorce between religion and daily life.

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The hold of the creeds upon conduct has been loosening. Vast numbers of people, indeed, have not felt the change, but vast numbers have felt it. If we compare, in most countries, the influence to-day of the church, the temple, the mosque, the synagogue, with what it was two hundred years ago, or even one hundred years ago, we cannot fail to note the difference. Thoughtful men will not ignore this feature in the contemporary world, or underestimate its importance. It cannot fail to be a cause of grave anxiety ; not only to the leaders of the religious organizations, but to everyone. If the ancient buttress of morality is weakening, how can it be strengthened ? Or is there a substitute ? Philosophy cannot neglect facts that are patent and profoundly significant, and look the other way as though the matter were not her concern. A survey of practical ethics would be incomplete indeed which took no account of the past and the present of the greatest of ethical forces.

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The chief reason for the existing situation is plain enough. The new factor which has come in, and has made the difference, is modern science. There is a field in which the spheres of religion and science have overlapped. So far as the creeds have dealt with the nature of the universe, its origins or its history, with the history of man, or with particular events in the realm of nature, they occupy ground which science also occupies; they have felt the impact of the discoveries of astronomy and geology, of physics and biology. The acceptance by the scientific world of the Law of Causality, the Law of Uniformity and the Principle of Evolution has inevitably had a profound effect upon certain of the beliefs, dating from earlier times, which had been regarded as integral parts of the several religions. There arose what has been called "the conflict between Science and Religion." It is this conflict which, more than any other one cause, has thrown the modern world into

the state of intellectual confusion in which it finds itself.

It cannot be ended by saying that what science declares does not matter to religion, and what religion declares does not matter to science. As the Italian philosopher, Professor Aliotta, puts it, "It is a false way of understanding the spiritual life, to claim to divide the soul into various compartments, in one of which, for example, would stand philosophy, in another religion, in another art, and so on. The spirit is entire in all its functions." "Reality is one," says Professor Pringle-Pattison, "and, after all, the human mind is also one, and not a bundle of unconnected and conflicting faculties."

Nor can the conflict be ended by emphasizing the limitations—and they are real—of science. We may agree that a vast province lies beyond the domain of human knowledge. We may agree that the things that we know are things as we



know them ; “ the eye sees only what it brings with it the power of seeing ” ; what our minds perceive must be connected with reality, but is not likely to be identical with reality. We may readily admit that what is held in one age to have been proved as true is often found by later discovery not to be true. Many times science has offered a theory which the world too soon has acclaimed as a fact, and disillusionment has followed. “ No man of science,” says Professor Whitehead, “ could subscribe without qualification to Galileo’s beliefs, or to Newton’s beliefs, or to all his own scientific beliefs of ten years ago.” But with all caution and with every allowance for error, there remain many things, lying well within the present sphere of human knowledge, which the mind is bound to accept as true. If the exponents of a particular creed deny these, they will succeed only in alienating numbers of clear-sighted and intellectually honest men.

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And the conflict could not be ended, on the other hand, by claims to be all-comprehending, which, in an earlier day, were sometimes made on behalf of science. Such claims are not now heard. It is recognized that, since the universe, as we know it through science, is not self-explanatory or self-sufficient, there must of necessity be something outside it or within it, of which science does not tell us, but which is fundamental.

Analyse as far as you will the things about us. See the human body as a complicated congeries of cells, each cell as an organization of chemical atoms, each atom as a system of electrons moving at immense speeds. See the stars as blazing, swirling masses of gas ; destined to cool, to divide possibly into suns and planets, to produce earths like this, even to evolve in some cases, in a billion years, some kind of living occupants. Accept, if you will, the Einsteinian theory that space is curved and returns on itself and the universe is finite. We

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are still only at the beginning. Even if a perfected knowledge traces some day the whole course of development, from the simplest elementary stuff to the highest manifestations of mind—"the evolution of gas into genius"—the question will remain, whence the gas; whence its capacity so to evolve? Even if discovery succeeds in breaking down the distinction between living and not living, and it is found that there is one continuous whole—still will remain the problem of the existence of that whole, and of the existence of its qualities. We have come to know that much that earlier generations were called upon to believe is not credible. But that there is nothing to be believed—that would be the most incredible of all.

This book is not a treatise on religion; and it is not within my function to discuss how far present currents of thought tend towards a reconciliation between religion and science or in what way an adjustment may be reached. But it is

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impossible for any writer on practical ethics in these times not to express a deep concern lest the influence which has been the main support of a sane morality among the hundreds of millions of human beings living together on this planet, should be weakened, and totter, and fall.

Nor could any writer on ethics accept the position that this disaster should be avoided by the rejection or the subordination of truth. Fatal would be the dilemma offered by any who would say that, since beliefs which reason must reject are integral parts of their creeds, and since their creeds are the essential foundation of morality, we must accept what we are convinced is false rather than lose what we know is good. Whitehead has stated the position in powerful language: "When we consider what religion is for mankind, and what science is, it is no exaggeration to say that the future course of history depends upon the decision of this generation as to the

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relations between them. We have here the two strongest general forces (apart from the mere impulse of the various senses) which influence men, and they seem to be set one against the other—the force of our religious intuitions, and the force of our impulse to accurate observation and logical deduction.”

Most precious among the treasures of man are both Goodness and Truth. Is he to be told that he may have Goodness only if he is ready to surrender Truth, or else Truth, but only at the sacrifice of Goodness? A sound ethic must insist that these shall not be made the subject of an impossible choice. Whatever may be the means and the method, it is vital to the well-being of mankind that the two shall merge.

There are, of course, other causes for the weakening of religious influences besides the impact of the new science on the old theologies. Powerful and widespread in the modern world is the move-

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ment among the peoples for the improvement of the standards of living. A just discontent with poverty, insecurity, inferiority of status, bad environment, is the underlying force which impels hundreds of millions of the working-classes, and vast numbers of others who think them right, to strive, with unceasing effort, towards better conditions. The movement, taking various forms, industrial and political, permeates all the progressive countries of the world. From the time of the French Revolution, which was largely a social upheaval, the movement found itself—not everywhere, but almost everywhere—either actively opposed, or at the least discountenanced, by the ecclesiastical organizations. Enthusiastic social reformers, animated by what they were convinced was a deeply moral purpose, were alienated when they found, ranked among the defenders of existing abuses, or forming part of that vast mass of inert indifference which was so hard to move, those whose functions made them the

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official exponents of the accepted creeds. Religion and social progress, which should have been allies, appeared to be enemies. The division sometimes hampered social progress ; more often it injured the cause of religion. In the latter part of the nineteenth century and during the present century, there has been a change in many countries. The churches are no longer, for the most part, a merely conservative force. But some effect remains from the earlier conflict.

Further, there has come in recent years the moral shock of the Great Wars. Since 1914, multitudes of people, who would not ordinarily pay much attention to the deeper questions of life and morality, have been forced, by their own experiences and the experiences of those nearest to them, to think about fundamental things. The contrast between what they have been taught and what they have seen, between a divine and loving ordering of the world and "the senseless abomination of modern war," is so glaring that the

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new generation stands bewildered. It awaits some fresh interpretation.

But these also are matters which would take us too far afield.



## CHAPTER VIII

### REWARDS AND PENALTIES

EVERY man is moved partly by self-interest and partly by altruism ; the proportions vary in individuals according to their characters, but both motives are always present. Moralists may rank the altruistic as the higher, but they cannot dispense with the egoistic. A system of ethics which relied solely upon sympathy and the good will to ensure right conduct would be regarded as unpractical, and justly so. Any nation which abolished straightway all restraints upon bad action and all rewards for good action, in the hope that every man would do right for the sake of the right, would collapse. Those conditions are the ideal ; we may advance towards them ; we dare not act as though they had already been achieved.

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Rewards and penalties, apart from those which religion offers, are of various kinds. There is one system established by the State ; men may be influenced by the hope of honours and dignities that Government can confer and by the fear of punishments imposed by the law. This is the special province of politics, which includes jurisprudence. There is a second system which is the outcome of the economic organization of society. If a man shows qualities of industry, enterprise and reliability he expects to be rewarded with a comfortable livelihood, or even, under the existing order of society, with affluence ; if he lacks those qualities he may expect to be penalized by poverty or destitution. This is the province of economics. And there is a third system which is founded on public opinion. The community can give praise or blame, can confer rewards of its own for merit and inflict penalties of its own for wrong-doing.

The three systems are inter-connected. No clear dividing-line can be drawn

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between them. But since one of them primarily belongs to politics and one to economics, I propose to limit myself here to the third, and to invite consideration of the part played by public opinion as a sanction for morality.

Because man is a social being he cares for the judgement of his fellows. He is gratified by praise and hurt by blame. To possess a good reputation with family, neighbours, friends, to avoid social condemnation or ostracism, is undoubtedly a motive for good conduct. Pliny stated the case with substantial truth, though perhaps with some exaggeration, when he said, "How few there are who preserve the same delicacy of conduct in secret as when exposed to the view of the world. The truth is, the generality of mankind stand in awe of public opinion, while conscience is feared only by the few." Huxley expressed much the same view : " It is needful only to look around us to see that the greatest restrainer of the anti-social

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tendencies of men is fear, not of the law, but of the opinion of their fellows. The conventions of honour bind men who break legal, moral, and religious bonds ; and while people endure the extremity of physical pain rather than part with life, shame drives the weakest to suicide." A saying of the Arabs puts the point with cynical brevity : " In a town where you know no one, do whatever you like."

Every-day observation shows that where there is no effective public opinion, morals more easily become lax. A description of a riverside street in a port in the north-east of England gives a typical example. " It is a street in which one feels increasingly as one approaches the ferry that riverside quality into which the quarters of every town that lie near the wharves and banks always seem to deteriorate. There is something in the intercourse of sailors from other ports who come and go, nomadic, unvouched for, who appear and disappear, with no responsibility for their words or their deeds, that seems to bring

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to the whole world a kinship of lawlessness and disorder." Against such things society seeks to defend itself, in the first instance, by publicity. "As gas-light," said Emerson, "is found to be the best nocturnal police, so the universe protects itself by pitiless publicity."

The process is necessary, but it has its dangers. It is necessary because the other means of defence in the hands of society—the penal law—cannot in practice be applied in many cases of wrong-doing ; it is too clumsy and too rigid ; its weapon is force rather than persuasion, and force may easily go too far and destroy a proper independence of thought and action. The law may become "puritanical." Yet society cannot consent to see moral order limited within the narrow territories that may be controlled by the penal law, leaving anarchy everywhere outside.

The process has its dangers as well, because the coercion of public opinion may also be excessive, or it may be wrongly directed. It will often take the easy

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course of declaring that whatever is customary is therefore right, and mobilizing public disapproval against everything that is unconventional.

In a well-directed community this danger is recognized. Toleration of other people's opinions and actions, so long as they are not obviously injurious, is regarded as right. We are tolerant, partly because we can never be altogether sure that our own opinions are sound ; at all events not so sure as to allow us to feel that it would be quite safe in the general interest to suppress the other opinions. There is a possibility, even though it may seem remote, that it would be found afterwards that we had made a mistake, and had suppressed something that might have been useful. We are tolerant also because of the faith that liberty is a good thing in itself, and that people should not be robbed of it unless they are so using their liberty as to injure the welfare of others.

But even toleration may bring in turn dangers of its own. In the modern world

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there are few signs that toleration is likely to go too far, but there are signs that toleration may be confused with agreement. To say, for example, that another person has the same claim to practise his religion as I have to practise mine is one thing, but to say that all religions are equally right is a different thing altogether. Many people seem inclined to let the one attitude slip into the other. There is a danger that an age of toleration may prove to be an age of indifference. To renounce the power of compulsion does not remove the duty of persuasion. The world cannot advance if liberty of thought and action is held to justify wrong thought and wrong action.

Society, then, is faced by the problem how to secure that the individual shall do what will conduce to well-being on the whole rather than what will conduce to his own immediate well-being, as he would be disposed to see it. To this end it seeks, and rightly seeks, to make use of the motive

of self-interest itself. The question is how the individual can be led to prefer duty to inclination, and the answer is that one method—though not the only method—is to give him an inducement to change the original inclination into a different inclination which will correspond with the duty. In other words he may be brought to do what he ought, instead of what he would like, by his duty being made advantageous to him. And this can be achieved, not merely by waiting till the occasion arises and then offering some inducement, but by establishing a state of things beforehand which, so far as may be, will bring personal interest, as the individual understands it, into correspondence with general interest.

Society tries to accomplish this, sometimes through inculcating a sense of religion with its own system of rewards and punishments ; sometimes through the force of law or other State influences ; sometimes through economic rewards or penalties ; sometimes through the pressure of public opinion. But, as we saw earlier, the pur-



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pose cannot always be accomplished by any of these methods. There will remain a margin of cases in which the only valid reason that can be given for preferring duty to inclination is some form of altruism, and not self-interest at all. The smaller this margin can be made, the more likely the community will be to secure in practice, among ordinary men, a high average level of right action.

Moralists of all creeds and in all ages have emphasized the connection between good conduct and its reward and bad conduct and its punishment, and they have not limited the connection to another world after death. "Evil pursueth sinners ; but to the righteous good shall be repaid," says the Book of Proverbs. In the Buddhist Dhammapada it is written : " If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage. . . . If a man speaks or acts with a pure thought, happiness follows him, like a shadow that

never leaves him." And in the Chinese Yi-King : " The family that accumulates goodness is sure to have superabundant happiness ; the family that accumulates evil is sure to have superabundant misery." In our own time a writer such as Huxley was able to say : " The absolute justice of the system of things is as clear to me as any scientific fact. The gravitation of sin to sorrow is as certain as that of the earth to the sun, and more so—for experimental proof of the fact is within reach of us all—nay, is before us all in our own lives, if we had but the eyes to see it."

None, however, would venture to contend that the reward or the punishment always accrues to the person himself who acts, or that it follows directly upon the action. It is obvious that it does not. The connection is some time and somehow, on the whole and in the long run. But that there is such a connection is clear.

The reason is not far to seek. We have supported the view that mankind have regarded as good such conduct as will bring

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well-being, and as bad such as will bring harm. They may often not have been aware that they were doing so. They may even have repudiated any such principle. They may have declared that they regarded as good only such conduct as had been ordained by a particular religious creed, without realizing that the creed itself had so ordained for the reason that the conduct was thought to be such as would bring well-being. Often mistakes have been made, and moral codes have prescribed as duties various kinds of action which experience showed to result not in good but in harm. But if it is true that actions on the whole are accounted good or bad according to their consequences, then it is quite clear why conduct, which we term good, somehow and some time brings rewards, and conduct which we term bad brings penalties. If those were not to be the results we should not so term them. If "evil pursueth sinners," it is precisely because "sin" is that which evil pursues. If evil did not follow it we should

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not rank it as sin. Schweitzer says of Marcus Aurelius that he is "an enthusiastic utilitarian, like the rationalists of the eighteenth century, because he, like them, is convinced that nature herself has created an indissoluble connection between morality and those tendencies which are beneficial both to the individual and to the community." And to quote Huxley again, he held that "there is a fixed order of nature which sends social disorganization upon the track of immorality, as surely as it sends physical disease after physical trespasses." But it is not necessary to assume some metaphysical agent called "nature" which has created the connection. The matter is far simpler. "Morality" consists of those tendencies which are beneficial; "immorality" is that which causes social disorganization; just as "physical trespasses" are called so because they are those habits or negligences which do bring about disease.

"The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices  
Make instruments to plague us."

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But it is not a question of justice of "the gods". The simple fact is that when our pleasures are such as to bring consequences that plague us they are for that reason classed as "vices."

The ordinary view on these matters appears to see things that exist, but inverted. In the same way, before the establishment of the principle of evolution, the current opinion as to man's relation with nature was an inversion of the facts. It held that man had been created by a single, definite act; his mind and body had been adapted to the physical conditions about him, and those conditions to his mind and body; the adaptation appeared as a marvel of adjustment. There were lungs able to breathe the air that was provided; there was air ready to supply the lungs. There were digestive organs able to use the foodstuffs that existed, and foodstuffs such as could nourish the organs. And so throughout. Then it was found that the world came first, and that man was gradually developed in such form as

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would fit the world. The adjustment is not less perfect, the process is not less marvellous than at first appeared ; it may be judged far more marvellous. But, given the process, the outcome was inevitable ; in the sense that man is inevitably a creature who must suit his environment. If he had not been so, he would not have come into existence, just as countless varieties of creatures, which the imagination might conceive, have not come into existence.

So in the sphere of morals it has been currently thought that there is some mysterious, transcendental adjustment between the moral code and the rewards that seem, as a rule, to be won by those who obey it, the penalties that seem, as a rule, to fall on those who break it. The adjustment is there. But it is inevitable. It is part of the very nature of the case. It arises from the fact that the moral code is made up of injunctions that have been selected for the very reason that those are believed to be the rules, obedience to which brings welfare and disobedience suffering

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—either directly and immediately, or indirectly and ultimately.

There is a second reason for the connection. A community which wishes to promote good conduct need not, as we have seen, limit itself to appeals to pure altruism. It may also invoke the motive of egoism. Every community in fact does so. The way of the transgressor is hard, because society sets out to make it hard. "The family that accumulates goodness" has happiness because society tries so to shape its laws and customs that those who are good shall be happy. Obviously the adjustment is often imperfect. On the whole and in the long run the connection holds, but for particular individuals and in the short run it constantly does not. Cases continually occur in actual life which offend our sense of justice, precisely because the general rule that good conduct should be followed by well-being does not work out in practice. The cause sometimes lies in the fact that a mistake has

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been made in thinking that a certain course of action will bring good results and is to be classed as good. Experience shows later that it has brought bad results and should in future be classed as bad. Sometimes—and very often—the cause lies in an imperfect social system, which has not succeeded in properly adjusting its rewards and its penalties to the needs of the case. A sound ethics will lay great stress on the need of finding a cure for those imperfections.



## CHAPTER IX

### SOCIAL ETHICS

AN answer has now been offered to the second of the two questions which we took as our starting-point. In seeking the reasons why men should act rightly, we held that the best course would be to find what are the actual reasons which, in ordinary life, lead men to act rightly, so far as they do so. We found that they were various, and that prominent among them were social influences of several kinds. But the conditions all about us show that those influences often are wrongly directed or ineffective for their purpose. So we come to the question of the right direction and the strengthening of those social influences, that is to say, to Social Ethics.

Moral Philosophy began as a study of personal obligation, but it has found that

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it is bound to concern itself also with social obligation, since the two cannot be separated. They can no more be considered apart from one another by ethics than the organism and its environment can be considered apart from one another by biology ; and for similar reasons. When, therefore, man sets out to consider what he ought to do in order to promote welfare, both his own and other people's, he finds at once that a large part of his duties concern him as one of a family, an occupation, a church, a neighbourhood, a country, or as a member of the human race.

And each of those entities exercises upon him and others all kinds of influences ; among them the influences that tend to good conduct or bad. They are the agencies through which public opinion acts. Each of them—from the family up to the human race—consists of the person himself and others like himself, and of nothing else. If he and others cease to take part in their activities, they will have no activi-

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ties ; if he and others do not direct them rightly, they will be directed wrongly. There are duties which must be performed with regard to each of them, and it is obvious that a share of those duties rests upon this man, in common with everyone else concerned.

It is impossible to find any reason for exempting anyone from performing social duties according to his capacity. No one may escape responsibility for wrongs committed by any organization of which he is a unit, by saying that he had taken no part in the matter and had had no share in the action. To decide to do nothing is itself a decision ; to remain inactive is also an act. Whoever, for example, acquiesces in autocracy must accept a share of responsibility for the deeds of the autocrat. Whoever withdraws from the concerns of his family, or occupation, or city, or state, is plainly guilty of a dereliction of duty. If he recognizes no need to act, why should anyone else do so ? If no one acts, social influences disappear. With

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their disappearance, the most powerful safeguards of morality go as well, and with morality goes human welfare. Individual obedience to the requirements of social ethics is the foundation on which all else is built.

If that obedience is to be demanded and obtained, it is essential that what is presented as a duty shall really be such. The action which the individual is called upon to take must truly be conducive to welfare, so far as can be ascertained. If he discovers it to be no more than a matter of conforming to a routine or a convention, or of obeying some ancient authority of doubtful validity, with results which are valueless or even harmful, then he finds himself misled ; then the true duty is to refuse the alleged duty.

This brings us to a subject to which incidental reference has been made already, the fact that morality is not static. The ethical code changes, and should change, with the development of ideas, with dis-

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coveries, with changes of environment. Civilization emerges from barbarism precisely through the discovery that the right is not identical with the customary.

It appears that in primitive societies, so far as we are able to observe them, custom is supreme and is rigid. It is perpetuated through the training of the young ; it is enforced by violence when necessary, or by supernatural terrors invented to guard it, such as the primitive mind will not venture to challenge. But in course of time, custom is undermined, modified or overthrown by circumstances. The great religions establish their codes. Innovators at first and revolutionary, they too tend with the centuries to rigidity. What is right comes to be identified with what is orthodox.

Then it is realized that this also does not conduce to welfare. Experience shows that harm is being done. " Human nature need not be supposed to change," said Samuel Alexander, " but the enlargement of social relations and the complexity of living mean

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a constant revision of moral standards and a change in the system of conduct." Sometimes this is effected suddenly and by a violent convulsion ; far more often it is effected gradually and almost imperceptibly. Orthodoxy itself may change. " The orthodoxy of one generation is never precisely that of the next." The laws of the State, also, adapt themselves, and with greater ease. In every country the statute-book of the nineteen-thirties was very different from that of the eighteen-thirties. And social conventions change even more easily still.

Original and courageous minds strike out along new paths. Careless of obloquy or derision, brushing aside obstruction, they insist that their ideas shall be put to the test. They succeed or they fail ; they win fame as benefactors, or they are forgotten. Succeed or fail, such are the salt of the earth.

The old is not the best because of its age ; but neither is the new the best be-

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cause of its novelty. In each generation young people may be tempted to think that it is. They see with a fresh eye the laws and customs of the society into which they are born ; they perceive the futility of many of the conventions which their elders expect them to observe. If an appeal is addressed to them on the ground that everything which is customary is *prima facie* right, they may be inclined to decide that, since that is false, the opposite may be true, and that everything which is customary is *prima facie* wrong. Opinions will differ, according to temperament, as to which of these errors is the worse, but that both are errors is certain.

“ ‘ Old things need not be therefore true,’  
O brother men, nor yet the new.”

Change is not necessarily progress. Every pioneer was regarded at first as a crank ; but not every crank comes to be regarded as a pioneer. Innovation must justify itself. It is right that innovation

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should have to overcome difficulties. There should be friction enough to prevent incessant motion, while not enough to make motion too slow or impossible. A volatile community, without any firm basis of principle, taking no account at all of its own traditions, with its ideas in constant flux, would not serve its members best.

Because a custom originated long ago, had been justified on grounds now held to be untenable, and endured because it was protected by primitive taboos, it does not follow that it is a bad custom. One day's rest in seven, for example, is not to be advocated nowadays on the ground that the earth was made in six days, that the Creator rested on the seventh, and that therefore we should do the same ; but the custom itself may be found by experience to be most beneficial ; it may be quite right to maintain it, and even to safeguard it by law. The calendar of the French Revolution, which established a week of ten days, partly for the sake of a con-



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venient arithmetical division of the month, and partly in order to effect a change from the ordinances of the Church, was found not to be an improvement. The value of any institution or rule or custom is not decided by the history of its origins.

Every sound social system has in it an element of conservatism. There is need of caution against the too hasty acceptance of plausible ideas which would in fact prove harmful. What habit is to the individual, custom is to the community. It is well to revise one's habits, and if need be to change them, but not to go through life without any settled rules. "The world is born and advances by means of the inventions of liberty ; it is preserved and assured by the inertia of habits." Or as William James expressed it, "Habit is the enormous fly-wheel of society."

So here once more the question, at bottom, is one of balance. Self-assertion and discipline, progress and stability, each is needed in its right proportion ; and to find what is the right proportion, in all the

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infinite variety of occasions that present themselves, is the daily problem of the society and the individual, of citizen and State.

## CHAPTER X

### SOME CURRENT QUESTIONS

“ THERE are two sides to every question ”—and this is very true, for the simple reason that “ a question ” is that to which there are two sides. When there are no longer two sides there ceases to be a question. And this constantly happens. It is a mistake to suppose that the truth of this saying implies that no question is ever settled.

If a book such as this were being written in England a hundred years ago, and if the writer wished to discuss some of the issues which then occupied the minds of thoughtful and public-spirited people, he would have to consider a number of matters which are not topics of discussion to-day. They are for us dead controversies ; the arguments, the disputes, the passions they

aroused are a matter of history. They are settled questions.

We may take a few instances. The duel—a conspicuous example—has been already mentioned. A hundred years ago people were still debating whether negro slavery could be justified ; whether men ought to be hanged if found guilty of any one of a large variety of crimes besides murder ; whether child offenders should be sent to the ordinary prisons ; whether discipline in the army and navy should be maintained by flogging. It was still an open question in all classes of society whether drunkenness was to be regarded as a vice or as an amiable foible, a matter rather for laughter than for censure. People argued whether it was better that the children of the working-classes should remain illiterate, or whether schools ought to be provided for them. If they were provided, would it be right for the law to punish parents who sent their children to work and not to school ? Should Nonconformists be admissible to

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the Universities? And should burial in the old churchyards be allowed to them; or should the law insist that they should still be buried only in separate cemeteries? Ought a man to be excluded from Parliament because he was a Jew? The nation was just emerging from a bitter conflict over the question whether political power should be kept in the hands of the aristocracy and the well-to-do, or should be shared by the body of the nation. It was still a matter of hot debate whether trade unions should continue to be banned by the law; whether factory-owners and mine-owners should have absolute control over conditions of work, or whether the State should intervene to secure safety, sanitary conditions, reasonable hours of labour. There had been a long controversy whether the right way to deal with unemployed workers was, or was not, to offer the employers a subsidy in aid of wages if they would employ them again. Ought there to be a code of law to compel people to take such measures in their own houses

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as were required in order to safeguard public health? It was discussed whether marriage ought to be regarded as a contract, terminable on certain grounds by a judicial procedure, or as a sacrament, and of such a kind as never to be revocable; whether married women should be entitled to own property in their own right; whether women should be admitted to the professions.

It is worth while to set out these instances of what were then "questions" but have ceased to be so, as a reminder that progress may in fact be achieved; as an answer to the assertion sometimes made that, in a community such as ours, there is incessant talk with nothing accomplished; as a refutation of the shallow witticism "plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose."

Sometimes it may be necessary to reopen some issue that had been regarded as closed. A slip-back in moral standards in a neighbouring country may, for example, revive interest here in the question whether

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duelling is right or wrong. Or the difficulty of finding a solution to intractable problems of unemployment may lead men to ask whether, after all, some kind of subsidy in aid of wages might not provide the way. But, when all allowance is made for such cases, it is clear that each generation inherits a vast body of law and of custom which has been built up, piece by piece, by the earlier generations, and which is accepted as established. It is just for that reason that it invites little attention. Historians and students of history may go into these things, but not the ordinary men in ordinary course. He has to concern himself with old issues that are still unsettled, or with the new issues which changed conditions have raised. As Professor Schiller says, "It is precisely our doubtful beliefs that loom so large in our intellectual landscape, for it is upon these that mental activity is actually engaged." And this sometimes gives rise to the false impression that all beliefs are doubtful, that everything is still a "question" with

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its two sides, either of which may perhaps be right.

Morality is not static ; the vast process goes on continually all over the world through which the ethical code evolves. By private and public discussion, by political or religious controversy, by experiment, men seek to find out, point by point, in what it is that well-being really consists and how to secure it. Our forbears a hundred years ago were called upon to wrestle with the problems of their time, and we in our time must wrestle with ours.

Many of the problems that chiefly vex our minds to-day are the outcome of the invention of the steam-engine, of the electric motor and of the internal-combustion engine, and arise out of the transformation of industrial methods that has followed. Our age has to cope with a vast series of social questions, complex and difficult, springing from the separation between manual labour and the ownership of the



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means of production. They are made urgent by the fact that the people of a hundred years ago admitted democracy, and also laid the foundations of universal education ; the classes directly concerned have now political power and the knowledge to use it ; they insist that these questions shall not be ignored or evaded. The practical solution of the problems is indeed the province of politics and economics. But ethics has to set the goal.

Is it right or is it wrong that vast numbers of people, of character no worse than the average, should live in poverty—should not have incomes enough to provide, for themselves and their families, the requirements of physical health and comfort, with proper opportunities for culture and recreation ? If it is held that this is morally wrong, for the reason that such conditions are hostile to well-being, then it is for the politician and the economist to find the way of redress. They must not choose their course lightly, and so as to discover in the end

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that they have in fact increased the evils they set out to cure. They must be careful not to frame their measures so that, by lessening industrial enterprise and productivity and the facilities for the exchange of goods, poverty is extended in one direction as much as it is diminished in another. But neither must they be diverted by a care for individual or class interests to the detriment of the general interest.

Is it right or wrong that a community should recognize and perpetuate class distinctions—with different grades of education, of income, of manners, possibly of character? Is luxury defensible on the ground that to attain it gives an incentive to effort, or on the ground that it makes possible the emergence of new inventions and conveniences which afterwards become accessible generally? Or is luxury, on balance, to be condemned, for the reason that it is demoralizing to those who are surrounded by it, and offensive to the vast majority who cannot share it? If there is

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to be a greater measure of social equality, can this be reached by giving to youth an equality of opportunity, educational and industrial? Or must that be supplemented by a levelling-down of wealth? In that event, must not society consider one condition which is essential, expressed by Matthew Arnold: "Many are to be made partakers in well-being, true; but the ideal of well-being is not to be, on that account, lowered and coarsened"?

Such are some of the questions, still unsettled, which are posed by ethics. According to the answers that are given, the lines of political and economic action will be determined.

There is another group, attracting much attention in the present generation, which belongs more definitely to the ethical field—the questions that are concerned with the relations between the sexes.

Here again several causes have combined in these days to compel attention. The weakening of religious control among

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large classes of the population in most countries has brought into the field of discussion many matters — and these among them—which had formerly been looked upon as governed by ecclesiastical authority, according to rules which were fixed. Secondly, the movement for women's emancipation, successful over a large part of the civilized world, and culminating in the establishment of women suffrage, has placed many of these questions in a new aspect. Thirdly, the invention of methods of birth control, and of sterilization, together with the importance which social science attaches to eugenics, has raised issues which did not formerly exist at all. The modern world is confronted with the problems whether the traditional attitude towards marriage should be changed ; whether facilities for divorce should be enlarged or should be restricted ; what should be the attitude of public opinion towards irregular unions and prostitution ; whether birth-control ought to be stigmatized as immoral, or whether it

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is the rejection of birth-control which is immoral.

The answers to these and analogous questions must largely depend upon the view taken with respect to the family, as an institution. This is a matter of immediate and fundamental importance ; it touches every home ; its handling may have profound effects upon a nation's character ; it demands a fuller and more careful consideration than is often allowed to it.

In primitive societies the grouping in families is all-important. The family is responsible collectively for the good conduct, and for the protection, of each of its members. Where there are no police and no magistrates this system is the only preventive of crime and security for order. It may still be seen in full vigour among, for example, the migratory Beduin. In a race easily roused to passion, if a man is tempted to kill another, the only effective restraint may be the certainty that the

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relatives of the murdered man would sooner or later take revenge, by the killing either of the murderer or of his own relatives. The blood-feud is really a protection for the peaceful against the violent. It is based entirely upon the family principle, and depends upon that.

As civilization advances and the community becomes better organized, law-courts and police-forces are established ; other means of protection, less crude and less unjust in their working, become available. The family ceases to be of essential importance ; its maintenance is no longer a matter of life and death. Ties are relaxed ; individuals drop away.

Further, in earlier times, and in more recent times as well, the family was the only refuge in disaster. For the vast majority of mankind, life is full of insecurity. Sickness, loss of employment, old age, may bring anyone face to face with destitution. The family is a simple system of mutual insurance. The parents maintain the chil-

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dren in their youth, and the children maintain the parents, if necessary, in their old age. Every member of the family feels himself one of a group, each of whom recognizes a moral obligation to come to the help of any other who may need it. But in many countries of the modern world a vast system has been devised of State assistance, and of assistance through all kinds of voluntary associations, which lessens the need for family solidarity. The individual finds his guarantee of security more and more in the general community and less and less in the family group.

The fact that vast numbers of people spend their working lives, no longer in domestic surroundings, but as units in great agglomerations of workers in factories or mines, stores or offices, is another influence in the same direction. The custom among the well-to-do classes of sending their children away from home to boarding-schools and universities tends the same way. So it is that the idea of the family

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recedes into the background. Writers and speakers on social issues usually start with the assumption that they have to deal with two primary factors—the individual and the State or community. They are inclined to forget a third, which comes between—the family.

It needs no searching inquiry to show that, even in the present-day world, the institution of the family still has great services to render—services that are indeed indispensable. With regard to the nurture and training of children this is obvious. A stable, tranquil, friendly home is the right environment for childhood. There can hardly be a happy childhood without it. Psychological research reveals the profound importance to adult character of the influences that surround the child. And later, the adolescent feels that in his family he has a background ; a base from which he can sally out into the world, and to which, if need be, he can retreat. In youth and in adult life each one feels that he is not a solitary unit, confronted by



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alien conditions that may sometimes be too hard for him. No matter how complete may be the systems which society provides for assistance in times of difficulty, there is still need for a helping hand, nearer and more sympathetic, than any that can be offered by a distant and impersonal social organization. And men and women need affection and companionship. They need in fact all that is associated with the word "home."

There is a further consideration, connecting directly with the discussions in the previous chapters. Society has to find some means of inducing its individual members to act rightly when they are inclined to act wrongly. The influence of public opinion is one means among others. And the opinion of the family is a form of public opinion. Its scale is small, but on the other hand, acting at close range, it may be very effective. The man without family connections is deprived of a check upon conduct which others find, from time to time, of great value. It may be

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inconvenient, but it is a salutary inconvenience.

Over that large part of the sphere of conduct where police and law-courts do not operate, mankind still lives in conditions much the same as those of primitive communities. We still have to resort sometimes to the principle of collective responsibility. If one member of a family does a dishonourable thing, all the others feel a reflected disgrace. If one wins merited distinction, the others feel a reflected glory. And each person knows that this will be so ; that there is a group of people, who have been connected with him intimately from his childhood, who are certain to feel distress if he does ill, pride if he does well. The solitary man loses both a restraint and a stimulus. " The existence of each family group," says Whitehead, " involves a mixture of love, dependence, sympathy, persuasion, and compulsion."

The more the individual is accustomed to identify himself with his family, and his own interest with theirs, the more he will

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be ready to act on a long view rather than on a short view. To induce him to do that is the aim of morality. What Burke said of the State is true also of the family ; it is “ a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.” A man who is tempted to do wrongly has an additional motive for refraining, if he feels that his conduct will be a discredit to the traditions left by his ancestors and a reproach to his descendants. Family honour is a stand-by for social morality.

History shows us that peoples which have attained majesty and stability have done so largely because of the strength among them of the family system. It was a principal foundation of the greatness of Rome, of the permanence of China, of the efficiency of Japan. It was, and still is, one of the main factors in such successes as have been won by the Jewish people.

Its claims, of course, are not absolute—

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any more than the claims of the individual or the claims of the community. All three have to work in with one another. There are countries in the East, in which the idea of patriotism has been little developed while the idea of family has been powerful from times immemorial, where public welfare suffers severely as a consequence. Nepotism is rife in the administration. When there is a conflict between duty to the family and duty to the public, the former is ranked first, almost as a matter of course. And everywhere there are individual cases where the plea of family obligation, pushed too far, may destroy well-being ; cases of elderly people who are parasitic on their children, and suck their lives to nourish their own ; or of young people who ruthlessly use their relatives' sense of obligation to serve their own pleasures. But it must be held that normally, and rightly directed, the institution of the family is of fundamental importance to individual and social welfare.

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This conclusion must be a leading factor when we come to form judgements on many of the questions, now widely debated, which arise out of the relations between the sexes. Stable marriage is, of course, the essence of the family. A secure home, a reliable affection, are only possible if there is a lasting companionship. Unions, whether licit or illicit, lightly made and lightly broken, cannot make for well-being. And of forms of marriage, in those countries where polygamy still prevails, it is being increasingly recognized by thoughtful men and women, that the system of monogamy is the best.

If these views are sound, then those who depreciate the institution of marriage, who wish to see it weakened and perhaps ultimately disappear, would be directing us to the wrong path. The proper grounds for divorce are a matter for close consideration, and a large body of opinion in Great Britain supports their extension ; but those who would stretch them so wide that to enter upon marriage would no longer be a

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grave act, but something to be undertaken light-heartedly because easily revocable—are not necessarily, as they themselves suppose, pioneers of progress.

The moral duty of choosing wife or husband with due regard to the transmission to the next generation of good qualities, and the elimination of hereditary taints, is closely connected with the question of the family, but may be considered more conveniently in a subsequent chapter. There are economic questions that are also connected ; particularly whether the wage system ought to include an element of “ family allowances,” as is usual in unemployment benefits or in the payments to soldiers and to sailors in the navy. This touches the conflict that exists in the political and industrial sphere between those who say that justice requires that all employees, both men and women, should be regarded as individuals and should receive equal pay for equal work ; and those who say that justice requires that the in-

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stitution of the family should be taken into account, and that men workers, who usually have responsibility for maintaining a family, should receive from society a larger income than women workers, who usually have not. But to discuss this would carry us outside the scope of this book.

Many examples might be given of other questions under debate nowadays, which raise ethical issues but which also extend into other more specialized domains. How far does the penal law still stand in need of reform, so as to make it conform with modern ideas of humanity without leading to an increase of crime? The principle of the sacredness of all human life having been much shaken by the Great Wars and the accompanying increase in many kinds of violence, ought a deliberate effort to be made to reassert it as a universal rule? Is suicide to be condemned in all cases without exception, and if not, what should be the exceptions? The growth of irrational superstition in the present day

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attracts attention ; is this to be accepted as quaint and amusing, or condemned as demoralizing ? Is gambling to be regarded as a harmless recreation or as a vice ? How far are the questions it raises to be considered as personal, and how far as social ? Is " art for art's sake " a sound rule for the artist to follow ; or must art, as well as science and all other forms of human activity, take its due place in a co-ordinated system of life ? To what extent is it a duty to promote social amenities ? Ought it to be regarded as immoral to build an ugly house ? What is to be said about the intrusion of advertisement, the spoiling of the beauty of the countryside ? And about the infliction of unnecessary noise ? How far should society try to secure that the influence of the Press, of literature, of the theatre, the cinema, broadcasting, should be wholesome and not harmful ? And should this be done, if at all, only through public opinion ? Or should law be invoked, and if so, to what extent ?



## SOME CURRENT QUESTIONS

If another book such as this comes to be written a hundred years from now, I wonder how many of these questions will then be regarded as settled—and settled rightly.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE NATION AND THE WORLD

MORE momentous and more urgent than any other moral issue under debate in our age is the question whether a nation has any duties to other nations, and if it has, in what they consist.

“ Among uncivilized races intra-tribal theft is carefully distinguished from extra-tribal theft. Whilst the former is forbidden, the latter is commonly allowed, and robbery committed on a stranger is an object of praise.” Is this right or wrong? And does it differ in any essential from the principle still maintained in many countries, that a State has no duties except to its own members, and need not scruple to make war upon other peoples if it thinks that it is in its own interest to do so?

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This is the doctrine known in Italy as "*il sacro egoismo nazionale*." It is the doctrine of Fichte: "Always," he said, "without exception, the most civilized State is the most aggressive." It is the doctrine of Treitschke, for many years a leading professor in the University of Berlin, who wrote: "War will endure to the end of history. The laws of human thought and of human nature forbid any alternative, neither is one to be wished for." It is the creed of Nietzsche: "Man," he said, "shall be trained for war, and woman for the recreation of the warrior; all else is folly." It is the creed of militarism always and everywhere. It is the greatest peril that faces the modern world.

When it is said that this view is immoral, its advocates answer that the State need have no concern with morality. "The State," says Hegel, "is the divine idea as it exists on earth." "It is," he says again, "the absolute power on earth: it is its own end and object. It is the

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ultimate end which has the highest right against the individual." "Hegel permits the State, as the highest expression of social morality, to escape from any moral restrictions."

If it is said that this view is irrational, because in the long run it works injury both to the particular State itself and to its neighbours, it is answered that there is no need to be rational. That is merely "modern intellectualism." Emotion should be the stimulus, intuition the guide and force the instrument. If, indeed, importance is attached to "welfare," this school holds that welfare is not to be found in material comfort or in the pleasures of mind or spirit; it is to be found only in the "will-to-power," in struggle and in victory. When it is asked why these doctrines should be accepted, an answer is refused. "It is so; and if you do not accept them you shall be conquered by those who do." Such an attitude obviously takes the whole subject of social action outside the range

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of discussion. It is no more possible on that basis to consider intelligently any question of national or international politics than it would be to argue about the desirability of law and order with a gangster armed with a machine-gun. But law and order may be desirable, none the less.

The basis of this school of thought is the Hegelian doctrine of the reality and supremacy of "The State." This doctrine itself rests on nothing but an arbitrary and unconvincing assertion. "The State" is no more a reality apart from a people than a swarm is a reality apart from the bees. It is the fact that men, like bees, have an innate tendency to co-operate, but this does not confer "reality" upon the forms which they may adopt to that end. The State, as has already been urged, is nothing but a number of men and women organized for certain purposes of common action. Any metaphysical doctrine of the State as "an entity real in its own right" can be no other than

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a delusion. And we can find no reason for thinking that the men and women, when they act together as a community, can have any different morality from that which they accept when they act separately as individuals.

Leaving now that extreme expression of the militarist creed, we come to those who do not hold it as avowedly non-moral and non-rational, but would offer a defence for it on ethical and rational grounds. Several defences are offered.

It is said that international conflicts evoke supreme efforts, unlimited self-sacrifice, qualities of heroism ; they give a great impetus to efficiency ; they stir mankind from sloth. This is certainly true. But we must ask at what cost ? And is there no other way ? We do not set fire to our houses in order that the firemen may show their bravery, or wreck our ships to give opportunities to the lifeboatmen. The immeasurable physical suffering, the anguish of mind, the devastating economic

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ruin, which are the features of modern war, far outweigh in the scales of human welfare any such benefits. Nor have eras of peace been the least fruitful in material and intellectual gains. The seething activities of modern life give ample scope for all the virtues. Men may touch moral greatness elsewhere than on the battlefield. It is not in this plea that we can find a justification for war.

Evolution is said to offer one. War is to be regarded as nature's way of eliminating the unfit and ensuring progress. Plants and animals are engaged in a constant struggle for existence ; nations make war upon one another ; it is assumed that the one process is analogous to the other. A brief reference was made in the first chapter of this book to the relation of the principle of evolution to morals in general ; but it is desirable here to draw attention to some further considerations.

War, in the modern world, does not exterminate. If it did, war might perhaps receive some sort of sanction from biology.

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But ruthlessness cannot now be carried to that point. Not even a Treitschke would assert that the ideal nation was one that had not scrupled to destroy physically every other. Unless, however, the less fit are exterminated they will continue to survive, side by side with the fitter. Consider the many wars that have been waged in Europe and Asia during the last hundred years. In which of them has the result borne any resemblance to the replacement of one species by another such as takes place in nature ?

That replacement is not brought about by events that are in any way akin to human warfare. It is the result of competition or conflict between individuals, not of battles between opposing forces. As Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell says, "One species is not supposed to advance in serried ranks against another, wolves against bears, eagles against vultures, firs against beeches, and so forth. The competition is internal, amongst the individuals of a species."



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So far as a war has any biological effect upon the survival of the fittest it is usually unfavourable rather than favourable. Both in the nation that is successful and in the one that is defeated, numbers of the fittest are killed off. The method, approved by this theory as nature's means of raising physical standards, in practice results in the disappearance of some thousands, or millions, as the case may be, of the strongest and bravest. Let the process only be repeated often enough, and populations of old men, cripples, and women would survive as evidence of the value of war in promoting virility.

And here more than ever the fallacy is plain of supposing that "fittest to survive" is the same as "best." Even if it were the case, which it clearly is not, that war eliminated the defeated, the outcome would be merely the survival of those who had shown themselves the best fitted to conquer. They, no doubt, would regard this as proof of an all-round superiority. But that is by no means self-

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evident. Ability to conquer is one thing ; a high place in the human scale may be another. When the Tartars or the Turks swept over great portions of the civilized world, it is far from certain that progress was served. Evolution through war may encourage and establish a fitness merely of barbarism. If in any country all the restraints of morality and of law were abolished and social relations were left to be settled by ruthless brute force, those who were the fittest to cope with the new conditions would no doubt survive and become predominant. But they would not be the best. They would be those whom we now call criminals. It is no different with nations.

Sometimes the argument drawn from evolution takes another form. It is said that war is not indeed part of a biological process, but that it is part of the process by which ideas compete with one another, by which social organizations are tested and the character of peoples is put to the proof ; through the conflict, the best

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among these become predominant, and by this means the world advances. But in this form the argument has no connection with natural evolution and can claim no support from the authority of science. The process is not biological but social ; the competing units are not physical organisms but ideas or characteristics ; the outcome is not survival and replacement but predominance and influence. Darwinism has nothing to do with it. The issue is reduced to simple questions of fact : Does war promote the influence and diffuse the methods of the more progressive peoples ? If so, does the advantage outweigh the cost ? Are there other less costly ways of achieving the same result ? Each person will answer these questions according to his own reading of history and his own deductions from the experience of our times. The more far-sighted will, I believe, give the answers—that in some directions war has proved to be a stimulus ; that, here again, the enormous losses in other directions far

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outweigh the gain ; that different and better modes exist for ensuring the spread throughout the world of useful ideas, methods and characteristics.

The advocate of the other view may raise a specific case and ask whether this can hold good where an inferior race occupies a vast territory to the exclusion of a superior. Would it have been to the advantage of mankind, for example, to have left the whole of America north of Mexico, to the half-million of Red Indians, who were the only occupants four centuries ago of that area ; or the whole of Australia to the 150,000 of Black-fellows who were there at the end of the eighteenth century ? A candid answer can only be that it would not have been to their advantage. The territories were far more extensive than those populations needed. They could not put them to the best use, measured by the results to human welfare. So also it was not defensible that in a newly colonized country a small number of the

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settlers should monopolize, for themselves and their descendants, vast areas of cultivable land. Laws to ensure closer settlement were held to be justified in Australia and New Zealand, for example, the original settlers being allotted such compensation as was considered fair. If they had refused to submit, the law would have compelled them. In such cases the conflict of interest has been between people of the same race. The moral position is essentially the same when the conflict has been between people of different races. The real question that arises in connection with European settlement, in America and Australia and elsewhere, is not whether it was justified in itself, but whether its methods were right and the treatment of the aborigines was fair. In general, the special case of colonization does not support the militarist philosophy of the advantage to mankind of recurring war.

The advocate has one further argument, usually regarded as the strongest. Always, he says, there have been wars, and, in

spite of the efforts of amiable idealists, there probably always will be. They spring from causes deep-rooted in human nature, and human nature does not change. The fact may be regrettable, but it is a fact none the less. And since wars, he says, are sure to come in the future, no matter what we in our own country may do, it is as well to take measures beforehand to ensure that, when they come, our own country shall not lose but shall profit. Some would add that it is as well to take any favourable opportunity to forestall the possible launching of war by others, by initiating it ourselves. And as the citizen of each country usually shares the common vanity of thinking that his own people, their customs and ideas, are the best of any, he will satisfy his conscience by believing that in the long run such a policy will work out to the general advantage.

In every theatre of action in all times such voices have been heard. Had they been listened to we might still be in the

conditions of the Stone Age. Certainly we should still be practising piracy on the sea and slave-raiding on land ; sacrificing on our altars the enemies we had captured in incessant tribal fighting, or being sacrificed on the altars of the enemy gods. We may be sure that each of these customs had its defenders in its day, and that each was claimed to be a natural practice, which always had existed and always would. If anyone were now to seek to restore those customs, he would be regarded as not less mad than the reformers were doubtless regarded who were the first, in some distant age, to dream of destroying them. Human nature, after all, is not something mysterious, extraneous and fixed ; it is nothing else than our own nature, our own opinions and habits, and the opinions and habits of other men and women not very different from ourselves. We know, from the reading of history and from observation, that these are open to change ; slowly, perhaps, and reluctantly, but still

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open to change. So also with regard to the impulse to war.

The history of England records that, during the period of 126 years from 1689 to 1815, the country was at war, against peoples of European race, in sixty-three of those years—exactly one year in every two. Then there came a change of ideas, a change of constitution and a change in the principles of British foreign policy, and in the ninety-nine years between 1815 and 1914 there were five years of war and ninety-four years of peace. Human nature presumably remained much the same. Yet wars, such as in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were regarded as “inevitable,” were found in the nineteenth century not to be so. Nor are we obliged to say that, because the Great Wars did in fact take place, they therefore could not have been avoided by greater wisdom and goodwill in those quarters where they had been lacking. Man is not so weak a creature that he need wait passively for the outbreak of other wars ;



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helplessly cowering under the advancing shadow of some sinister "Necessity." There is no "Necessity." There is only ourselves, and our own will-to-peace or will-to-war. Those who say that wars are inevitable, and who act accordingly, are themselves the cause which may make them so.

It may be asked, What is the bearing of principles such as these upon the idea of Patriotism? Always regarded hitherto as among the chief of the virtues, is patriotism still to be so regarded? Or is it to be looked upon as inseparably connected with militarism, and therefore to be condemned?

The individual man, in his relations with his neighbours, is moved by two main influences, self-interest and sympathy; rightly directed, each helps the other; morality consists in maintaining a due balance between them. When he is acting as a citizen, sharing in directing the policy of a country, the position can

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be no different. Persons combined together as a nation have duties to themselves in that capacity, just as individually they have duties to themselves as individuals. And they have also, as members of the nation, duties to their neighbours, of the same order as the individual's duties to his neighbours. For ethics, the conception of neighbour cannot be limited to those who live within the same political frontiers ; no valid reason can be given for doing so. Both egoism and altruism, therefore, have their part to play where nations are the units, as where persons are the units. And here also each, rightly directed, helps the other. To raise the standards of civilization in one's own country helps the well-being of the world ; and the greater the well-being of the world, the better for one's own country. International morality consists neither in a complete sacrifice of national interest for the sake of international, nor in the ignoring of international interest for the sake of national, but in the right balance

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between them. Patriotism ranks as a virtue when, and only when, it conforms to this fundamental rule.

The revulsion from militarism leads some thinkers to condemn the idea of country altogether; they would discard it in favour of a complete cosmopolitanism. But they forget valid facts on the other side.

The world, with its two thousand millions of inhabitants, is obviously too vast and too varied to be ruled as one state. If only for convenience of government it must be divided into political units. That being so, each unit should be of such a kind that service is enlisted, self-sacrifice is evoked, cohesion and stability are maintained. To that end affection and enthusiasm will powerfully contribute; and all history shows that the spirit of patriotism is the most potent agent in inspiring those emotions.

Secondly, the existence of national units, in between the individual and mankind, meets a psychological need.

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“Patriotism,” as Karl Pearson said, “seems to be based on the reasonable acknowledgement of two facts in our nature : that we owe a duty to our fellow-men, and that we cannot adequately perform it to the race at large.” Nationality puts the average man into touch with something which is greater than himself, yet not too vast and too complex for his imagination easily to grasp. To destroy it would leave a void.

The world’s variety, again, is a good thing in itself. It adds to the true wealth of mankind. If all the peoples were moulded to a single pattern, life would be the poorer. It is fortunate that there still exist these differences of characteristics, transmitted to us from diverse origins and through diverse histories. So long as the characteristics are not harmful in themselves they should be cherished, for the sake of their very diversity. Nationality is the chief preserver of distinctive qualities and customs, institutions and literatures, arts and crafts. It saves the world from a flat and dull uniformity.

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Lastly, separate countries do in fact exist ; some of them have been animated by the philosophy of militarism, and may be again. In this situation, what should be the attitude of the other countries ? Because they condemn force, must they passively acquiesce in the domination of the world, themselves included, by those who do not condemn force, but who are ready to use it ? Must their very hatred of militarism bring them to surrender to militarism ? “ It must be remembered,” said Dean Inge, “ that, in spite of the proverb, it takes in reality only one to make a quarrel. It is useless for the sheep to pass resolutions in favour of vegetarianism, while the wolf remains of a different opinion.” With the world as it is, self-defence is a duty, and to inspire that defence patriotism is the stimulus.

I have suggested that egoism and altruism, each in its measure, serve one another, among peoples as among individuals ; but this has not been the

accepted opinion. Nationalism and internationalism have been regarded as mutually exclusive. "All cannot be happy at once," said Sir Thomas Browne, "for the glory of one state depends upon the ruin of another." And Voltaire expressed the current view when he said, "Such is the condition of human affairs, that to wish for the greatness of one's own country, is to wish for the harm of its neighbours."

If this has ever been true, it is certainly not true in the modern world. We know from the clear lessons of experience that an active international commerce increases the wealth of all countries and the comfort of their peoples. The exchange of ideas in religion and philosophy, science and art, medicine, law and industry, benefits all who participate. All share in the risks, and in the consequences, of war. Mankind is inter-dependent as never before. Each country prospers best in a prosperous world. The ruin of one is not the glory of another but its loss, and the level of

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civilization anywhere depends upon the level of civilization everywhere.

Egoism unbalanced by altruism hurts the egoist himself, whether he be a person or a State. It degrades his own moral character, and leads to actions which his conscience must condemn ; with loss of self-respect comes loss of effectiveness. And it is certain to provoke resentment in others. A country which seeks only its own aggrandizement arouses abroad a general hostility, which sooner or later, as all history shows, will bring it to disaster. An aggressive patriotism does not serve the ends of patriotism, and so is not patriotism at all.

Any sound system of ethics must condemn war. It is self-evident that, directly, warfare does not promote welfare, for its methods are death and destruction. Such advantages as it may bring indirectly cannot be shown to outweigh its essential evils. How it is to be prevented ; what better methods can be provided for settling

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disputes between nations ; how antagonisms between races are to be avoided ; by what machinery world order can be substituted for world anarchy—these are political questions. They are outside the scope and the capacity of philosophy. But it is for philosophy to show to mankind why the ideas of the militarist, which claim a philosophic foundation, are wrong.

By militarist, let it be repeated, is not meant one who is ready to take up arms for the protection of his country when attacked, or who is willing to risk his life, if need be, to defend liberty or to penalize aggression. For such no tribute of gratitude can be too great. By militarist is meant one who holds the creed that a State has the right to pursue its own aggrandizement by force regardless of the well-being of any other State ; who glorifies war for its own sake, and regards greatness as identical with conquest. Whoever holds that view adopts, in the community of nations, the same position



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morally as the criminal adopts in the social community, and the public opinion of the world should not hesitate to declare him such.

## CHAPTER XII

### MEN AND ANIMALS

BEFORE we proceed to our conclusions, there still remains to be considered an important group of questions, quite separate from those discussed in the preceding chapters. They are the questions that arise from the relations between men and animals.

It will not at first sight be clear how these are to be connected with our original starting-point. We defined good actions as those that conduced to welfare, and we defined welfare as consisting of a great variety of "goods," all of which served, in one way or another, to promote human well-being. But what of animal well-being? Are we to say that that is outside the purview of ethics; that there is no reason why we need consider at all the

happiness or the suffering of any kind of animal ; that we should feel free to inflict upon them, with complete indifference, any degree of pain ? That would certainly not fit our conceptions of morality ; it would conflict with all our ideas of “ goodness.” If our first principle led to that as its conclusion, the principle itself would have to be rejected.

There are some who, starting from a basis of intuition or of sovereign conscience, declare that animals have “ rights ” ; that these are fundamental, and on a par with those of men ; that “ both are equally God’s creatures,” and that it is for that reason that consideration is due to animals. I do not think that our original proposition is open to the objection stated ; nor that this alternative can be sustained.

It cannot be sustained, first because of the insecure foundation which intuition offers for morality ; this point has already been discussed. Secondly, the idea of “ rights ” is itself unsound ; a claim of right rests merely upon assertion, and can

be met by counter-assertion ; we did not admit a theory of " the natural rights of man," we can admit even less a theory of the natural rights of animals. And, thirdly, if accepted with sincerity and applied with consistency, this alternative principle must lead to results that would be disastrous in practice.

If animals have equal rights with men because they are equally God's creatures, then it must be as wrong, morally, to take the life of an animal as it would be to take the life of a man. All conscious life must be regarded as sacred. This is the position taken by certain sects of Hindus. It cannot be limited to the higher animals—to the mammals, or even to the vertebrates ; the principle itself allows us no ground for any such distinction. It would involve that if, for example, a whole country is faced with famine through the threatened destruction of its crops by an invasion of locusts, the human population must not defend itself by destroying the locusts. It would involve surrendering our houses to

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the mice and the cockroaches, our food to the ants and the flies, our beds to the fleas, and our fields to the birds and the rabbits. But if this extreme view is rejected as absurd, then the principle itself goes with it. Animal rights are no longer regarded as absolute. Human welfare is admitted as a factor.

The question then becomes a different one—whether it is to be the only factor ; or whether there is to be a kind of balance, in which human well-being and animal well-being are to be regarded as equally valid fundamentally ; and are to be weighed one against the other, on some scale of values. I can see no logical basis for such a proposition, which is really the doctrine of “ abstract rights ” in a slightly different form. Nor is it necessary to have recourse to it, for the objection raised against our original principle does not hold.

It is not the case that to connect the idea of goodness, or right conduct, with human well-being involves the exclusion

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of animal well-being. And this is not only because many animals are useful to man, and the better they are treated the greater will be his advantage. That reason is valid so far as it goes, but it would be quite inadequate. It would permit any degree of cruelty to non-domestic animals, or in the slaughtering of animals for food, or in many other ways. There is another and a wider reason. It was expressed by Kant when he said, "Violence and cruelty to animals is quite contrary to the duty of man to himself."

The reason is, as Kant pointed out, that "thereby sympathy with the sufferings of animals is blunted in man." The motive of sympathy, the emotion of pity, are themselves elements in human character, the development of which make for man's good ; practices which blunt them are *pro tanto* bad ; unless they are adopted for the sake of some greater good of a different kind, they must be accounted wrong.

Nor may the individual man claim that his actions in this sphere are a matter for

his own judgement. If—someone might say—the animal has no abstract rights of its own, and if he himself does not happen to feel sympathy or pity in the particular case, it is not the concern of anyone else whether he does or does not commit what others may choose to call an act of cruelty. But the matter is not solely individual. It raises social issues. A man who treats an animal cruelly not only degrades his own character, and thereby makes himself a less valuable member of the community, but also, if it is known, offends the feelings of numbers of other people, and so commits an anti-social act. “Cruelty to animals,” as Professor Ritchie said, “is rightly supposed to be an offence against *humanitarian* feeling. Our duty to the animals is a duty to the human society. It is an offence against civilized life to cause any unnecessary suffering, or to do any unnecessary damage—‘unnecessary’ meaning unnecessary for *human* well-being.”

Humanitarianism has developed rapidly in modern times, and it is easy to see the

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causes. Primitive man felt himself in constant danger from the animal world, and at the same time he largely depended for his food on attacks upon it, in which almost every male took part. Life was spent in a constant mutual hostility. The position still remains much the same in countries untouched by civilization ; but elsewhere the control of man is now so complete that this reason for antipathy has disappeared. There remains an exception with regard to creatures which are classed as “ vermin,” because they are still a source of injury.

Secondly, the establishment of the principle of natural evolution has had effects upon the feelings of mankind towards the rest of the animate world. On the one hand, some have been influenced in their ideas by the fuller revelation of the ruthless preying of one species upon another ; they may have been disposed to say, if nature is “ red in tooth and claw,” why need man be so squeamish ? But on the other hand, this has been far outweighed



by the general sense of the civilized world which refuses to accept the law of the sea, the swamp and the jungle as its own moral standard. And the discovery that man is not the product of a special act of creation and separate in kind from the lower animals, but is allied to them physically and in some degree mentally, has given rise to a certain sense of kinship, and with it to a feeling of greater sympathy. Westermarck, in his *Origin and Development of the Moral Ideas*, lays stress upon this ; and he adds the further point, “ apart from any theory as regards human origins, growing reflection has also taught men to be more considerate in their treatment of animals by producing a more vivid idea of their sufferings.”

And the increasing complexity of modern society has brought with it the practical need for new rules of social conduct ; this in turn makes it necessary to emphasize the duties of the individual to the community, and this renders it essential to foster the motive of sympathy. The age

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is compelled to stress our duties to our fellow-citizens, to all our fellow-men. The same impulse which has intensified the humanitarian spirit has also widened its scope. The effect of the impulse has not stopped at the boundaries of the human race, it embraces the animal world also ; and the wanton infliction of any suffering anywhere has come to be banned by the more sensitive conscience of modern man.

The change of view in modern times compared with ancient may be illustrated from the custom of animal sacrifice. No one who would seek to initiate a religious movement nowadays could possibly persuade the general body of opinion that the killing of animals as part of a ceremonial could have any religious value. Such a practice would be regarded, on the contrary, as fatal to genuine religious emotion.

If these principles are sound, each person will try to apply them, according to the

best judgement he can form of the facts, in each actual case that presents itself. He has to decide whether it is ever right, and if so in what circumstances, to make use of animals for labour, for food, for adornment, for sport, or for purposes of scientific research. Acute controversies have arisen on some of these points. The subject of vivisection is a conspicuous instance, and we may briefly consider it as an example. With vivisection is to be included inoculations of animals by research workers, causing pain or disease.

Here it is necessary first of all to establish the facts. Is it, or is it not, the case that vivisection has assisted the development of medicine and surgery in the past, and is there reason to expect that it will do so in the future? If the answer is negative, then the practice clearly cannot be justified; for man would be causing suffering to animals without benefit to them or to himself. But if the answer is in the affirmative, then it may be a choice between, on the one hand, inflicting

suffering, during the periods of research, upon a number of mice or guinea-pigs, or other animals, and, on the other hand, leaving various human diseases unprevented and uncured. In that case there would be involved sufferings as great, or perhaps much greater, on the part of a far larger number of more sensitive beings over the whole future of the human race. There is little doubt which choice would be the more humane. But whether the facts themselves will support the one view or the other is in dispute ; if anyone is to form an opinion on the main issue he is clearly under an obligation to ascertain to the best of his ability to which conclusion they point. It is common ground in any case that, if vivisection is to be practised at all, avoidable suffering should always be obviated by insisting upon the use of anæsthetics wherever practicable, and by the imposition of such other conditions as the case may require.

The baiting, the chasing or the killing

of animals for the amusement of men and women raises, of course, different considerations. In England, for many centuries, setting dogs to fight bulls or bears, or setting cocks to fight each other, were popular sports. They came to be offensive to public feeling, and Parliament enacted laws which suppressed them. Similar laws have been passed in almost all civilized states ; bull-fighting in the Spanish-speaking countries is a conspicuous exception. There the predominant public opinion holds that the display of courage and grace, of agility and skill on the part of the bull-fighters, and the interest and excitement aroused among the spectators, more than justify the suffering inflicted upon the bulls and the horses. The effect of the spectacle upon the character of the nation itself does not yet appear to be taken into serious account ; just as the Romans did not realize the effect upon their own characters of the gladiatorial games. It will be for the Spanish-speaking peoples to decide whether the

public exhibition of animals, unable to escape, being goaded to charge at men and to gore horses, and finally being killed in the sight of the audience—whether such exhibitions, whatever may be the pomp and circumstance of their ceremonial, are consistent with a worthy civilization.

How far considerations of a similar order apply to other sports in other countries ; how far distinctions should be drawn between sports that involve animals of comparatively high mental development such as deer, foxes and hares, and those that affect fishes ; whether it is legitimate for civilized man to give vent to the primitive hunting instinct, in cases where the animals would in any event be killed, either to supply food or because they are dangerous or destructive ; whether the training of animals of various kinds to perform tricks in circuses is open to reasonable objection—these are some of the matters now in general debate. And there is in addition the wider issue

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raised by vegetarianism. The application of general principles to such specific cases is the office of public opinion and private judgement.

## CHAPTER XIII

### CONSCIOUS EVOLUTION

DURING thousands of millions of years this earth has been in the making. Over a period of millions of years various forms of living beings have developed. Man slowly emerged many hundreds of thousands of years ago. Civilization has arisen within the last few thousands. Now we, of the living generation, take our place in the procession of the ages. But there is one difference between our times and all the times, remote or near, that have preceded. There is now, as never before, a race of beings on this planet which is aware of part at least of the cosmic process.

The sciences, with infinite pains, have revealed how the present has been evolved out of the past. Although so many things are still unknown ; although the sciences



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have hardly touched the fringe of the problems of existence itself, of life and mind, and of the Cause moving in the universe, still we perceive, at least in part, the method that pervades the whole. Glimpses had been caught of it, in earlier times, by some precursors in the realm of thought ; but only in our own era has it been made manifest, for the guidance of all mankind.

And, little by little, man has been building up the record of his own experience. He is now able, if he will, to draw the lessons. He may learn, if he will, how his civilization has grown—what has helped it and what has hindered. The development of language, of writing, of printing, has made possible the record itself, and its transmission from one generation to another. Libraries are the collective memory of mankind. We have at hand the materials for our own instruction.

There has always been evolution. Henceforth there may be Conscious Evolution.

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From the beginning, living creatures have indeed helped their own development. "It is bad biology to think of the struggling organisms as necessarily like fishes in a net ; they often share in their own evolution, selecting their environment, for instance, as well as being selected by it." And this, of course, holds true especially of human beings. But no creature other than man can share in the process of evolution with deliberate intention, and man has become able to do so only now. The moulding of our destinies hitherto has been mainly at the hands of what Professor Whitehead calls "senseless agencies."

In his notable book, *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead summarizes his account of the process in the following passage : "We have here history on its senseless side, with its transitions pushed forward either by rainfall and trees, or by brute barbarians, or by coal, steam, electricity and oil. Yet even the senseless side of history refuses to accept its own proper category

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of sheer senselessness. The rainfall and the trees are items in a majestic order of nature ; Attila's Huns had their own intellectual point of view in some respects surprisingly preferable to that of the degenerate Romans ; the age of coal and steam was pierced through and through by the intellectual abilities of particular men who urged forward the transition. But finally, with all this qualification, rainfall and Huns and steam-engines represent brute necessity, as conceived in Greek thought, urging forward mankind apart from any human conception of an end intellectually expressed. Fragmentary intellectual agencies co-operated blindly to turn apes into men, to turn the classic civilization into mediæval Europe, to overwhelm the Renaissance by the Industrial Revolution. Men knew not what they did."

Amazing has been the advance by methods so fortuitous. " A blind man may hit the target ; but how many arrows wasted ! " The advance may be swifter

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and more assured now that we have begun to know its conditions.

Embarking upon this great new enterprise of conscious evolution, we need to guard ourselves against certain errors. It has been thought that, in evolution, "Nature" has given us a "law," and that our conscious part in the process, if any, can only be to discover what its provisions really are, and to hasten to fall in with them. Much confusion has arisen from the fact that the word "law" is used in two quite different senses—one in scientific writings, the other in everyday life. The Law of Gravity, for example, or the Law of the Conservation of Energy, or the Law of Evolution, are not in the nature of commands ; these are simply descriptive names for processes, or sequences of events ; they have nothing in common with a moral law, such as "Thou shalt not steal," or with the laws framed by statesmen and legislatures, and enforced by penalties. From a theological point of

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view the methods of nature may indeed be considered as ordinances ; but not from the standpoint of science. “ Evolution is often regarded as a sort of force, instead of as the merely descriptive conception which it is. If there is an active unity behind evolution, it is something inferred, but not observed.” Man’s share in the matter is not limited to watching himself being evolved by the “ senseless agencies ” ; his conscious participation does not consist merely in having ascertained the principles by which those agencies act. He has a contribution of his own to make, and it may be made deliberately. It may be framed of set purpose so as to work in with, or to modify, what is termed “ the natural law.”

A second misconception arises from a strange theory that human history moves in cycles ; that nations, like individual organisms, pass through stages of growth, maturity, decadence and death, so that our efforts, however deliberate, must conform to that fundamental rule, or else be

doomed to futility. No valid ground can be offered for any such belief. Ingenious philosophers, anxious to formulate striking generalizations, have given a plausible air to the theory by judicious selection of historical instances which seem to support it, and by equally judicious omission of those that do not ; but any close analysis will show that it is a superficial plausibility and nothing more. There is in the history of human affairs no proof of any geometrical movement whatever—whether circular or spiral or rectilinear. Nor is it the case that the influences affecting nations are the same as those which determine the life-cycle of organisms. An analogy can no doubt be drawn between certain features in the organization of a society and certain features in a physical organism, as Herbert Spencer pointed out in a well-known essay. But to say that a nation is in fact an organism, and therefore subject to quasi-physiological processes, can only be described as an abuse of terms. The idea that, do what we may, each nation, or

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each order of civilization is doomed sooner or later to decadence and extinction, is a baseless superstition, unsupported by proof and indefensible in argument.

Those who are temperamentally inclined to pessimism find a somewhat better support in another direction. So far as our present knowledge goes, it has been established that, in course of time, the sun will have radiated so much of its heat that the earth will be uninhabitable. It will become, like the moon,

“ A ruined world, a globe burnt out,  
A corpse upon the road of night.”

With that prospect at the end of the vista, what, it is asked, is the value of your “conscious evolution”? Let man strive as he will, build up a race as noble, a society as majestic, as the most idealistic imagination can conceive, it will end at last in a frozen desolation, and all is vanity. But the astronomers, who tell us of “the dying sun,” tell us also that, at the present rate of diffusion of solar heat, it will take

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a million million years before the time comes when life at the human level will be impossible upon this planet. For every one year that has elapsed from the Stone Age until now, at least one hundred million years will elapse from the present time until the end. So that any nervous apprehension on that score seems to be premature.

The principle of conscious evolution will take account of three main factors—first, the physical basis of human life, that is the number and the quality of the human beings brought into the world ; secondly, their physical environment ; thirdly, their environment of ideas.

Nowhere has research been more fruitful in recent years than in the fields of embryology and heredity. The construction of microscopes of greater and greater power has enabled us to watch the minute mechanism by which physical characteristics are transmitted from one generation to the next. The investigation of heredity



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along the lines initiated by Mendel has disclosed, also, the rules for selective breeding. They have been tested in the breeding of domestic animals, food-plants and flowers with remarkable results. "Heredity and breeding," says Sir Peter Chalmers Mitchell, "are becoming exact experimental sciences." Efforts are being made to adapt the rules, so far as practicable, to mankind. There has arisen the new science of Eugenics.

It tries to find the means by which the physical qualities of the human race may be improved generation by generation. As, gradually, the right rules are established, the practice of those rules will become a part of the ethical code. There is here an example of the way in which moral ideas expand and change in consequence of discoveries by science. Already it has become a matter of conscience, when choosing a wife or husband, for people who are alive to social duty to have regard to physical and mental qualities for the sake of posterity; in particular, not knowingly to

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perpetuate a strain of mental deficiency or instability. It is constantly said, " In view of his family history, So-and-so ought not to marry and have children " ; and the person himself, if the facts are so, usually recognizes his obligation. To put debased money into circulation is an offence ; it is being realized that to put degenerate men and women into circulation is a much graver offence. How far, if at all, these ideas should be embodied in legislation and enforced by penalties is a question that is under debate in various countries.

Heredity and environment both play their part in the evolutionary process. Which is the more important has given rise to long, and sometimes lively, controversies ; but no one doubts that, in whatever proportions, each contributes. Conscious evolution must stress the need for continuous improvement in environment. To effect this is less difficult, and quicker of accomplishment, than the improvement of inherited characteristics. Particularly is this so in matters of physical environment.

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The great advance in public sanitation has been one of the chief successes of modern civilization. "Our increased knowledge of hygiene," says Professor J. B. S. Haldane, "has transferred resignation and inaction, in face of epidemic disease, from a religious virtue to a justly punishable offence." Large further advances are now within reach. As Haldane says again, "There is still an immense amount to be learnt about health, but if what is at present known to a few were part of the general knowledge, the average expectation of life in this country could probably be increased by about ten years." Good planning of the cities, proper housing for the workers, purification of the atmosphere of industrial centres, easy access from the towns to the country and to the sea—these are among the methods which we may adopt, with conscious purpose, in order to promote the further evolution of the race.

There is also the environment of ideas, that vast invisible network of influences,

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permeating social life, which guides individual action. Ethics is an agent of conscious evolution, and an agent which plays a supremely important part. Reject or neglect the moral codes, whether personal or social or international, and the evolution of man into the future will go on, as it must; but it will be towards a future not of continuous progress but of certain disaster.

Browning said of his "Grammarians,"

"Yea, this in him was the peculiar grace. . . .  
That before living he'd learn how to live."

Peculiar indeed, for it is the exception for men to plan their lives. Many are like thistle-seeds, casually blown by the wind, sprouting where they chance to fall if the soil is propitious. Or one may recall Galsworthy's metaphor—"like gnats above a stagnant pool on a summer evening man danced up and down without the faintest notion why."

Socrates became a student and a teacher

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of philosophy because, after going about among the most intelligent men in Athens and questioning them on their ideas, he found that not one had troubled to study the right way to live. After two thousand years we, like the Athenians, are all busy, intent, purposeful. But on what business are we intent? For what purpose are we hurrying? Racial evolution cannot be separated from individual evolution; if the one is to be conscious and not "senseless," so must the other. It is because learning how to live remains a grace that is peculiar, that, as Emerson said, "The appearance strikes the eye everywhere of an aimless society, of aimless nations."

Here it is that ethics enters, trying to find what things are good, what aims are worth pursuit; teaching that each society exists to promote the perfection of its members; that each nation should help, and not thwart, the efforts of the rest. It sets the goal for politics and economics, for all the vast variety of activities which

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make up the seething life of the modern world.

Religion may powerfully co-operate. "The paramount virtue of religion," says Matthew Arnold, "is that it has *lighted up* morality; that it has supplied the emotion and inspiration needful for carrying the sage along the narrow way perfectly, for carrying the ordinary man along it at all." The strongest minds may dispense with emotion, and, seeing life by the clear white light of reason, may go along their path unhelped by what they may regard as adventitious aids. Not so with the average man and woman; still less with the child. Perilous as emotion is for guidance, it is invaluable for stimulus. It ought never to be the substitute for reason, but may always serve as an invaluable agent and an inspiring ally.

If conscious evolution is to be taken as the ruling principle, it is clearly essential that both philosophy and religion should do what science has done with such bril-

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liant results, and escape from what has been called "the backward-looking habit." "No one can walk backwards into the future." Philosophy and religion are not branches of historical study ; they are, or should be, living spirits ; learning indeed from the past, but in order to be the guides of the present in its march into the future. And there need be no diffidence or humility in setting the aim, nor pessimism as to the possibility of attaining it. If, as we now know is the case, unconscious evolution has enabled the lower animals to be the prototypes of simian man, and simian man of man in civilization, then there is no reason why conscious evolution should not raise us, and with vastly accelerated speed, to something as much higher again in the scale of being.

But however that may be, it may at least be possible, under the influence of wise ethical ideas, to reach, within a time not too distant, a state of society far better than that about us—in which there shall

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be dignity, as well as activity, in private life, simplicity in manners, beauty in environment, majesty in the State and tranquillity in the world.



## CHAPTER XIV

### SUMMARY

It will be understood that, in a book as short as this, dealing with a subject so wide as Practical Ethics, it is impossible to do more than indicate some main lines of thought. It must be left to the reader to pursue them further, if he will, and to seek the answers to the many specific questions that arise at every point. Doing that, he will find himself led insensibly into the spheres of religion, of politics and of economics. Each of these, in part at least, is—or should be—applied ethics. No fixed boundaries exist to separate any one of them from the others.

It may be useful if I end with a review and summary of the ideas which have

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been put forward for consideration, adding here and there a further point or offering a different presentation.

Ethics asks, in the first place—What is right and what is wrong? The history of philosophy shows, I submit, that it has been found impossible to answer this question by laying down any simple, general principle of any kind. There have been many attempts, made by some of the most acute intellects that the human race has produced; but no formula, and no system, has been proposed which has won general acceptance. There is no agreement upon any definition of “Goodness” as a whole, of which particular “goods” may, so to speak, be regarded as fractions.

It is therefore better to begin at the other end. It is better to say—this particular action, or idea, or custom, is good; that other is also good; there are in fact vast numbers of things, each one of which in itself is good. We find that many of

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these are alike ; they may be grouped into classes ; we may say that each of those classes is good. For example, it is seen to be right to tell the truth on this occasion ; it is also right to tell the truth on that occasion, and the other ; we may reach the generalization that it is right to tell the truth on all occasions. Or we may possibly find that there are certain exceptional occasions on which it would not be right to tell the truth, in which case our generalization would be that it is almost always right to tell the truth. Broadly speaking, to tell the truth is one element in goodness. There are other elements, built up in the same way. Taken all together they make up " Goodness." The perfectly good man would be one, all of whose actions would come within those classes. Included in actions are thoughts ; to think is itself to do something.

In other words, the concept " Goodness " is an ultimate synthesis of particular " goods " ; " goods " are not to

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be reached by analysis of an initial idea of " Goodness."

The question next presents itself—How are the particular " goods " to be recognized as such ?

Various suggested answers must, on examination, be rejected. The answer cannot be that the decision is to be left to the individual conscience. The fact that a man holds that " this is a right thing for me to do," does not make it so. If another man says that he is wrong, there ought to be some method of deciding between them. Unless there is some method, it is at all events certain that nothing worthy to be called a science of ethics can exist. Morality is left anarchic. Individual conscience, then, cannot be the ultimate test of right and wrong. Conscience may err. " Although we hold it to be wrong of a person to act against his conscience, we may at the same time blame him for having such a conscience as he has." Why can we ever be justified in

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blaming him? There must be some reason other than the fact that the dictates of our own consciences happen to differ from the dictates of his.

Nor can the answer simply be that whatever "the community" holds to be right, is so. Such a doctrine would have justified every evil custom which has ever degraded and disgraced mankind. The laws in force at any particular time are not to be considered good laws merely for the reason that they are in force. If that were so, no laws could ever be changed. What the community at one period holds to be right, is often held at a later period, but in similar conditions, to be wrong. This is undeniable, and the fact is conclusive against the doctrine that actions which are generally approved are thereby established as right actions. Ethics is not merely an inquiry into what are, actually, the feelings or opinions of any set of men, any more than into the feelings or opinions of the individual man. What is desired is one thing, what ought to be desired, is

—or may be—another. “The mere fact that a given man or set of men has a given feeling or opinion can never be sufficient, by itself, to show that an action is right or wrong.”

Nor, again, can the answer be that whatever arises in the course of evolution is good, relatively to what has gone before. It is obvious that the later is not the better merely because it is later.

The answer suggested for acceptance is that right actions are those which are conducive to human welfare. They come to be recognized to be so through a vast and continuous process of discussion and experiment. Into this process there enter the opinions of individuals ; and these are often combined into the judgements of communities. Integral to the process are the root instincts of human nature. They are modified and guided by reason, which is itself not less a part of human nature ; and reason is directed by its own interpretation of the results of experience.

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The process itself is fallible. Constantly actions or ideas are held to be good which experience shows not to be so. Then either nothing is done, on account of inertia, and mankind suffers in consequence ; or else a movement is set on foot to effect a change. The movement may work through persuasion or through force, or through a combination of the two. It may sometimes take centuries before a change, recognized by the enlightened to be desirable, is carried into effect. A wrong idea or custom may be bound up with some political or ecclesiastical or social system, which is cherished as valuable in itself. If the system is stereotyped and unable to change, great difficulties may ensue. The most violent controversies in human history have arisen from this cause.

But morals are not static. Sooner or later, in one place, or in several, or in all, the code is modified ; the categories of rights and wrongs are changed. Taking a retrospect over the centuries it is seen that

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the ideas of right and wrong, which are embodied in customs, in laws, even in religious beliefs, differ from one period to another. How do they come to differ? In the long run it is through that process of discussion and experiment. Individuals change their opinions. In time, public opinion as a whole is found to have changed. Codes, conventions, creeds follow suit.

It is not to be suggested that this is a description of the course which human history, on its mental side, has actually taken with any kind of smoothness or uniformity. There have been active, at various stages in all parts of the globe, all sorts of irrational influences—superstition, magic, personal ambition and love of gain, race conflict, conquest. The chequered and blood-stained story of mankind is chequered and is blood-stained precisely because of that. But in so far as reason has been at work it has operated through that process; and if we wished that reason should



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work more effectively, that would be its mode.

When it is asked whether, in morals, it is the right action which counts, or the right motive, the answer must be—both. The right action is one good thing and the right motive is another good thing.

If it is asked whether the individual is right to seek his own well-being or that of the community, the answer must again be—both. His own welfare is a good in itself ; it contributes as well to the good of the others. The welfare of the society is also a good ; it conduces to the welfare of its members, and, as a rule, of this particular member among the rest. Where the two interests do not coincide, one must yield to the other, or a balance has to be struck between them. The art of private life and of political action consists largely in finding, in each case, which should yield or what the right balance is. Social progress consists in great part in trying to

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reduce these cases of conflict to the smallest number. That community would raise its organization to the highest pitch which was able to secure that every action of each individual to promote his own welfare would also contribute to the welfare of the society, and every action of the society for its own good would also promote the good of each of its members. Such an ideal may not be fully attainable, but the closer a community approximates to it, the better it is.

The second problem of ethics is why men should pursue goodness. For what reason should anyone act rightly at all ?

But at the outset of that inquiry the doubt arises whether men have any real power of choice. Has scientific determinism shown that there is no freedom of the human will ? And if free will goes, does not morality go with it ?

To this the answer here suggested is that the Law of Causality applies to man and to mind, as it applies everywhere else.

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Man cannot be excepted from nature, nor mind from the universe. In spite of some recent theories, there is no valid reason to depart from the principle that causality applies to all things. The human personality, with the rest, is the product of causes. But one element in the personality so produced is a power of choice in accordance with its character. The causes that have combined to produce an individual character are innumerable ; they are to a great extent unknown, either to the person himself or to others. It is impossible, therefore, either for him or for them, to predict with certainty what he will do in a particular case. But something is known of the determining causes ; and more may be known, through observation, of his character itself ; so that some kind of prediction is often possible. But in practice, both the individual and his neighbours must proceed in their relations with one another upon the basis that, when he makes a choice, he acts spontaneously. His personality, product of causes as it is,

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is an entity in itself ; it must accept responsibility for its own acts. And the fact that it is required to accept such responsibility, is itself one of the influences which will determine what course, in a given case, the person will actually choose.

Proceeding, then, to consider why men should act rightly, we must start from primary instincts in human nature, which have been brought forward, in the course of evolution, from animal nature in general. The sentiments of the mind are classified by different psychologists in various ways, but for the purpose of moral philosophy we may consider those which are commonly grouped together under the names of egoism and altruism. Both of these enter, and should enter, into the guidance of conduct.

Right actions may be divided into three classes. There are those which are to the direct and immediate interest of the agent ; he will do them for that reason. There

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are those which he sees, or which he may be brought to see, will be to his own interest ultimately ; he will do them, if at all, because of that. And there are those which do not in fact conduce to his personal interest at all, using that term in the sense in which it is ordinarily understood. Neither directly nor indirectly, neither now nor in any future which can be foreseen with assurance, will he as an individual derive any benefit. Nevertheless, they are actions which it is right for him to do. They conduce to the welfare of some other persons, or to welfare in general. Unless society is maintained, individuals will not be able to live well ; and it cannot be maintained unless the members are willing, when the occasion requires, to make sacrifices—either small sacrifices, or, if need be, great sacrifices—for the sake of the society, and without expectation of ulterior benefit for themselves. The individual will perform actions of this class—if he does perform them—because of the motives other than self-interest that

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animate him—love, duty, patriotism, the altruistic motives.

It is essential, then, for the welfare of the collectivity of persons, which we call society, that each one of its members should do what is right in those two classes of cases in which the individual gains no immediate benefit. Where he will gain an ultimate benefit, he has to be led to realize this. Where he will gain no benefit at all, or will suffer injury, he has to be induced to act from altruism.

“What is desired is one thing ; what ought to be desired may be another.” How are the two to be brought into line ? How am I to be led, as Goethe put it, to “bring my inclinations and my reason into perfect harmony” ?

Society may seek to achieve this through all kinds of influences. First comes the training of infancy and childhood, with family influences extending through adolescence, and often on into manhood and womanhood. There are educational influences and religious influences. There

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are rewards and penalties, some dispensed by the State, some by the economic system and some by public opinion. Individual character is moulded by all of these, and under their influence habits are formed. Each person cannot work out for himself a right code of conduct applicable to every occasion. He must accept—unless there is good reason to the contrary—the judgement of the community as the ordinary guide. Public opinion comes in, not as a final and infallible arbiter, but to interpret the facts and to indicate conclusions which are normally acceptable. In the Epistle to the Ephesians they were exhorted to seek “whatsoever things are of good report.”

Darwin summed up the matter in a single sentence—remarkably compact and comprehensive: “Ultimately our moral sense or conscience becomes a highly complex sentiment—originating in the social instincts, largely guided by the approbation of our fellow-men, ruled by reason, self-interest, and in later times by deep religious

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feelings, and confirmed by instruction and habit."

A system of ethics is not a construction ; it is something living, like a tree. It should be rooted deep in human life and character, drawing its sustenance from there and from the air about it. Alive, putting forth fresh shoots and leaves year by year, it grows into the future.

Looking forward into that future we see the vastness of the tasks waiting to be done. It is obvious enough—it needs no proving—that men as yet are far from having achieved their own complete well-being. In moments of pessimism we may even be inclined, dwelling upon the evils of our times, to ask what is the worth of our so-called civilization, to question whether, taking things all in all, there has been a real progress. Yet there are few who, on reflection, would seriously contend that it would be better for mankind to wipe out now the whole of civilization



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and to return to conditions of primeval savagery. Slowly, painfully, the generations that have preceded have brought into being the society that we have, full of faults and imperfections, but conferring, nevertheless, immense and real benefits. It is for the present and the future generations to endeavour to cure the faults and to remove the imperfections.

Upon us such a duty is even more incumbent than it ever was upon them, for we—the first in all history—have learnt the process of evolution which is at work in the universe. We have grasped, in some degree, what is our own position as inheritors of the past and progenitors of the future. From now on, human evolution may become conscious. It need no longer be dependent on “senseless agencies.” The change should greatly quicken the pace of progress—not only in things material, but in all things. And it should inspire a far greater confidence.

Early among the results of the new spirit of conscious evolution has been the

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recognition that the physical material of the race can and should be improved. The science of eugenics must take an increasingly important place among the social sciences. As was said by Sir Francis Galton, its pioneer, "We of the living generation are the dispensers of the natural gifts of our successors, and we should rise to the level of our high opportunities."

The inter-relations between individual and society must also be a principal subject of study. A people and its institutions are products of each other. A nation in one generation establishes a custom, or a code, or some new organization, and these help to form the nation in its next generation. "The individual," says Whitehead, "is formative of the society, the society is formative of the individual." Their relations are determined by politics, and politics cannot fail to play a foremost part in conscious evolution.

And not least in the international sphere. The philosophic eye, looking back over

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history, will see that nothing has so harmed men's welfare as the lack of a sound international morality universally recognized. And nothing has contributed more to the disasters and the perils of the modern world than the philosophy which teaches that there cannot be, and ought not to be, such a morality. The Hegelian doctrine is that, because there has not hitherto existed any super-national power, able to force nations to fulfil duties to one another, the nations therefore can have no such duties. This is equivalent to saying that, if there were no police force, it would not be immoral to murder and to steal. Nor can the citizens of the several States, if they retain any religious principles at all, for ever acquiesce in "the strange anomaly of Christian Europe, a society of nations all of which had accepted the religion of peace and brotherhood, with its universal ethics, yet which were constantly at war with each other."

For guidance in the pursuit of welfare, men must mainly rely upon their own

experience, and the experience of previous generations. Accurate records of the present and of the past are vital to progress. Exact statistics and true history are the materials with which a conscious evolution must work. Without them the people have not even a chance of learning what the results of past experiments have really been ; they are robbed of the most reliable of all tests in deciding what is right and what is wrong. So that those who deliberately falsify history, and, for the sake of some political or ostensibly religious motive, compel the teaching to children of deductions from the past that are untrue, commit the worst of all crimes against humanity. Ignorant of the facts, the new generations can hardly fail to form wrong judgements ; wrong judgements must necessarily lead to wrong policies ; there is no limit to the disasters which wrong policies may entail upon a suffering mankind.

An evolution which has become con-

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scious will no longer use such terms as " the inevitable march of events," or " obedience to the spirit of the age." It will be recognized that there are no such things as " events " which " march," or a " spirit " which must be " obeyed." These are mere figures of speech. They represent no reality. There is nothing existent in fact but individual men and women, with their training, their habits, their ideas, their actions ; men and women who vote at elections, or do not vote ; who write articles in newspapers, or read them, approve them or do not approve ; who lead movements, or join them, or oppose ; who fight or do not fight ; work or stop work ; who think about public affairs or neglect to think. Apart from them there are no " events," no " age " and no " spirit." Within the framework set by nature, the future evolution of mankind will depend upon the thoughts and the deeds of individual men and women, and upon nothing else. Each private act and each social activity, all the

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sciences and all the arts, take their places in one great scheme. It is for a wise philosophy to bring them into unison.

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## NOTES AND REFERENCES

IN some of the chapters of this book, I have reproduced passages from papers and addresses which have previously been published ; in particular, " The Dual Basis of Conduct," *Journal of Philosophical Studies*, July, 1930 ; " Patriotism and Peace," *Contemporary Review*, September, 1928 ; and three Presidential Addresses to the British Institute of Philosophy, subsequently published under the titles of *Philosophy and the Ordinary Man* (Kegan Paul, 1932), *The Tree of Good and Evil* (Peter Davies, 1933), and *Philosophy, Religion and Present World Conditions* (Contemporary Review, March, 1935).

The student of philosophy may observe that the term Value is not used in any definition in this book. Much controversy

has arisen about this conception ; and as that controversy has been technical in character and inconclusive in result, it would be undesirable in a short book of this kind to engage in it. Those who are interested may find an acute analysis of the various views held with regard to Value, but again without conclusiveness, in *The Philosophy of Value*, by H. Osborne (Cambridge University Press, 1933).

Some philosophers have engaged also in a discussion whether there is a distinction to be drawn between “ what is good ” and “ what is right,” and if so, where the distinction lies. To a great extent this is the same question as that of the relations between the results of an action and the motive ; but the inquiry into “ good ” and “ right ” is too technical and too linguistic in character to be entered upon here.

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